A STUDY OF TRANSITION COORDINATORS' IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGE APPRORPRIATE TRANSITION ASSESSMENT MANDATE

by

Stacie L. Dojonovic Schutzman

BA, Washington & Jefferson College, 1995

MS, West Virginia University, 1996

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This dissertation was presented

by

Stacie L. Dojonovic Schutzman

It was defended on

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and approved by

Dr. Rachel Robertson, Faculty, Department Instruction and Learning

Dr. Anastasia Kokina, Faculty, Department Instruction and Learning

Dr. Michael Ward, Faculty, The George Washington University

Thesis Director/Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Naomi Zigmond, Emeritus Faculty, Department

Instruction and Learning

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The purpose of this research study was to examine how transition coordinators in LEAs, all practicing within the one state, were responding to the age appropriate transition assessments provision in IDEIA 2004. A survey accompanied by a letter requesting participation was sent to all transition coordinators identified in the annual Transition Coordinator Directory on the Pennsylvania Department of Educations website. One hundred and eight (108) LEA level transition coordinators completed the survey and provided detailed responses and explanations to multiple choice and open-ended questions about how they implemented the age appropriate transition assessment provision. The response rate of 31% indicated that transition assessment was a topic that transition coordinators wanted to discuss. Additionally, five LEA transition coordinators were randomly selected from those responders to participate in confirmatory follow-up interviews. In their responses, transition coordinators asked for a more explicit definition of transition assessment from the SEA, more time to implement transition assessment at the local level, a policy that mandates a full time transition coordinator in each district, resources from the state to enhance implementation of the transition assessment mandate instead of simple compliance, dissemination of evidence-based practices for transition assessment,

increased interagency partnerships with a true shared responsibility for implementing transition assessment, student and family involvement, and increased support from general educators for the implementation of the age appropriate transition assessment mandates particularly for students fully included in the mainstream. Implications of the survey results for practice and for future research are discussed.

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PREFACE

There are many people that I need to thank for their assistance and support with completing this research study. Beginning with the transition coordinators who responded to the survey and those who completed my interview. I am grateful to them for sharing their time and knowledge. It is my hope that we all learn from your experiences and improve the lives of all students.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

Strengthening of the transition service requirements is needed to help students with disabilities achieve successful postsecondary outcomes. But multiple studies have shown that it has been difficult for state and local agencies to achieve the successful implementation of many of the transition services mandates required by federal policy (Baer, Simmons & Flexer, 1996; Grigal, Test, Beattie, & Wood, 1997; Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999; Williams & O'Leary, 2001). Additionally, the implementation of federal transition mandates is a lengthy process that can take years to fully achieve (Furney, Hasazi, & DeStefano, 1997; Morningstar & Liss, 2008).

Nonetheless, to help youth with disabilities to achieve better postsecondary outcomes, the federal government has continued to issue mandates that should lead to stronger transition service requirements. IDEA 2004 strengthened the language around transition assessment by adding a mandate that age appropriate transition assessments must be used in the transition planning process for students with disabilities.

The introduction of this mandate for age appropriate transition assessment, however, uncovered a controversy over how transition assessment should be interpreted (O'Leary, 2006). The field had long supported a position in which transition assessment is student and family focused and an on-going process (Halpern, 1994; Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, & Leconte, 2007; Sitlington, Neubert, & Leconte, 1997). This position was consistent with the theoretical orientation of vocational assessment and evaluation. But the transition assessment

mandate suggested a psychoeducational orientation that was a professional-centered approach for the purpose of determining eligibility or service delivery methods.

Consequently, when the language for the IDEA 2004 transition assessments mandate was released, it fell to SEAs to arrive at their own definition for "transition assessment." States have struggled with meeting the compliance requirements in the IDEA 1990 transition mandates (Baer et al., 1996; Williams & O'Leary, 2001). Two years after the reauthorization of IDEA 2004, very few states had developed policies or guidance documents for interpreting and implementing transition assessments (Morningstar & Liss, 2008).

Since the Morningstar and Liss (2008) survey of SEA transition coordinators occurred during the summer and fall of 2006, new research was needed that examined how policy implementation of the transition assessments mandate was progressing at SEAs across the nation (Carter, Brock, & Trainor, 2014). Because of the critical role that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) play in implementing federal educational policies, the need remained to examine how LEAs have implemented the federal transition requirements, and especially the age appropriate transition assessments mandate now written into the federal law.

Of particular interest were the successes and difficulties that many educators and transition coordinators faced when attempting to define and implement age-appropriate transition assessment. The guidance provided to transition coordinators regarding these assessments were based on limited research and commonly believed-to-be best practices by the field, allowing the definitions to be skewed and biased. The goal of the current research was to uncover both overlapping successes and struggles within personnel from LEAs practicing in the field, to gain insight into the transition coordinators' experience of implementing transition policy including, but not limited to: feelings, frustrations, difficulties assessing students, backlash from teachers,

successful practices and processes, the amount of guidance provided by SEA for implementation, the amount of support provided by Federal government, SEA, and LEA, respectively.

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

In the existing system of education in the United States, state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) are responsible for the educational services provided to students (Sitlington & Clark, 2006). SEAs and LEAs must adhere to federal and state laws as these services are provided. One such federal law is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which mandates individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities who qualify to receive special education services (Turnbull, Stowe, & Huerta, 2007). IDEA was first enacted as The Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975. It has been amended and reauthorized many times since then. While IDEA provides provisions for many types of services to students with disabilities, one specific area focuses on the transition from school to adult life. The transition requirements under IDEA mandate planning to facilitate the movement toward better adult outcomes for students with disabilities, including better independent living, postsecondary education, and employment outcomes.

To accomplish the goal of improved post school outcomes, the reauthorization of IDEA in 1990 was "the first federal legislation mandating that a statement of needed transition services be included in students' IEPs" (Neubert, 2006, p. 39). This early mandate and subsequent reauthorizations of IDEA, however, included limits to the transition provisions. One such limit was that IDEA 1990 did not require the use of transition assessments when developing postsecondary goals for students. The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, however, changed that.

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It mandated that the IEPs for students with disabilities must include appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments (IDEA 2004). This has marked a shift in IDEA from a process-oriented approach to a results-oriented one (Kochhar-Bryant, Shaw, & Izzo, 2007; Turnbull et al., 2007). As part of the shift to a results oriented education for students with disabilities, the transition assessments provision has received national attention (Leconte, 2006). In part, the attention has surrounded how to interpret the new provision under the new results-oriented focus.

The reason why discussions have taken place is that while IDEA 2004 introduced the term age appropriate transition assessments, it did not provide specifications on how to define, interpret, and implement this provision. Instead, this responsibility has fallen to the personnel at the SEAs and LEAs. As O'Leary noted:

> The transition assessment process should provide practical information to help in postsecondary goal setting and transition service planning. No doubt there will be many discussions about what constitutes age-appropriate transition assessments (italics original), but regardless, IEP team members should have more useful information that should lead toward improved post-school results. (2006, p. 4)

O'Leary's statement that "there will be many discussions about what constitutes" age appropriate transition assessments has proved to be true. Indeed, personnel at some SEAs indicate that the transition assessments provision was being interpreted in the same manner as an evaluation or tri-annual re-evaluation, thus requiring parental notification and parental consent (O'Leary, 2006, personal communication). The national debate about the transition assessment provision led to a study by Morningstar and Liss (2008), which examined the responses of SEA personnel to the new transition assessments requirements under IDEA 2004. In this study, 36

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states responded to a survey sent to all 51 SEAs, including the District of Columbia, during the summer and fall of 2006. Out of the 36 SEA responses, two thirds of the states (66%), or 24 of the SEAs, indicated they had discussed the issue of defining the IDEA 2004 requirements for age appropriate transition assessments. When asked, "Does your SEA interpret the new requirements for age appropriate transition assessments in the same manner as an evaluation or tri-annual reevaluation?" ten 10 states (31%) responded, "Yes" and 22 (69%) responded "No." Of 31 responses to the question, "Has your SEA implemented any new policies that define or interpret age appropriate transition assessments?" only five (16%) reported that new policies had been developed. Clearly, a great deal of discussion had been occurring at the SEA level, but the implementation of educational policies is often complex and challenging, often hindering the ability of the LEA to meet the requirements of the policy (Furney, et al., 1997; Hasazi et al., 1999).

The IDEA reauthorization of 2004 strengthened the language around transition assessment by adding a mandate that age appropriate transition assessments must be used in the transition planning process for students with disabilities. Adding a mandate to a federal policy does not necessarily lead to its automatic implementation. Furney and colleagues (1997) wrote, "the implementation of any [italics original] policy is a challenging prospect" (p. 344). Indeed, in the area of transition, studies have shown that it has been difficult to implement almost all of the transition services requirements required by federal law (Grigal et. al., 1997; Hasazi et al., 1999; Williams & O'Leary, 2001). Of concern is how the additional mandate of including age-appropriate transition assessment in the transition planning process will be implemented by local educational agencies if minimal transition planning requirements are not being met.

The literature on policy implementation has indicated that it is often a challenging and complex process (Forester, 1993). In many cases, in order to be effective, implementation must account for local or regional contexts as well as the emotions, values, and morals of individuals (Fullan, 2001). In some cases with the federal education mandates contained within IDEA, policy implementation must also account for the critical role of state and local agencies. Consequently, a certain balance must be achieved among the powers held by three levels of government (i.e., federal, state, and local). In other words, state and local governments must comply with the U.S. Constitution and with federal laws upon which it is based. For example, state and local governments must comply with the Constitution's equal protection and due process doctrines that are provided under the Fourteenth Amendment (Turnbull et al., 2007). These federal doctrines extend to the area of education, and therefore, state and local governments must comply with federal disability laws such as IDEA. Often the Local Education Agency receives different messages or regulations from the state and federal level that cause confusion and ultimately the failure of the LEA to implement new policy and procedures.

To obtain compliance with IDEA, the federal government, through the U.S. Department of Education, produces regulations that state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) must follow. But the mere issuance of federal regulations does not translate into immediate implementation of these mandates. For instance, LEAs have displayed a great deal of variability in how they have "complied with the transition mandates" (Neubert, 2006, p. 41). More specifically, within the areas covered by IDEA legislation, transition has been one of the areas with the greatest amount of noncompliance during the years from 1990 to 1997 (National Council on Disability, 2000). There is a history of difficulty fulfilling and defining the transition mandates that have resulted in a number of due process hearings.

A number of due process hearings and courtroom trials on transition issues have pointed out the challenges of implementing the transition mandates (McAfee & Greenwalt, 2001). In a nation-wide study, Williams and O'Leary (2001) found that many of the SEAs did not meet the IDEA 1990 transition requirements despite receiving policy guidance, technical assistance, and targeted funding from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The researchers found a disconnect between the federal policy and the actual practices in the field at the local level. A disconnect between the policymakers and those in the field doing the work. Thus, the implementation of the transition services provisions contained in IDEA has proven to be challenging for all three levels of government, federal, state and local. It has proven specifically challenging for government executive agencies responsible for supporting and enforcing compliance such as state education agencies. The miscommunication between agencies is one of many factors that have caused the difficulty for SEAs and LEAs to implement effective transition assessments (Williams & O'Leary, 2001).

2.1 THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC POLICY ON THE TRANSITION MOVEMENT

IDEA 2004 strengthened the language around transition assessment by adding a provision that age appropriate transition assessments must be used in the transition planning process for students with disabilities. To better understand how this provision came into being, a brief overview of the concept of transition as an educational movement will provide the larger context in which the transition assessments provision has now appeared as a federal mandate.

Historically, the secondary transition movement had its foundations in the work-study movement of the 1960s and the career education movement of the 1970s (Sitlington & Clark,

2006). Sitlington and Clark (2006) pointed out that from 1960 to 1975 the state vocational rehabilitation agencies, working jointly with SEAs, were remarkably successful in helping youth with disabilities to find employment after they had exited from high school through work-study programs. These programs provided career options and opportunity for people with disabilities. This was a time of great optimism as SEAs and state vocational rehabilitation agencies were engaged in a highly successful collaborative effort that led school personnel to believe "that it was a permanent policy commitment" (p. 15). The collaboration between the SEA and vocational rehabilitation agency brought the importance of transition services to the forefront of special education services.

Although collaboration was needed for effective transition services for people with disabilities, two laws changed the prior movement: the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for all Handicapped Act (EHA) of 1975. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibited vocational rehabilitation agencies from paying for services when the funds were supposed to come from another agency. Then with the passage of EHA in 1975, funds were directed at educational programs instead of work-study programs. Thus, the enactment of these two policies created a shift in the mid-to-late 1970s where youth with disabilities spent less time in work experiences and more time in school-based programs. This led to the state vocational rehabilitation agencies withdrawing their funding for work-study programs (Sitlington & Clark, 2006). In turn, this strengthened the need for school-based career-focused programs, which led to the emergence of the career education movement. Ironically, the career education movement would fall victim to the same policy fate that had brought an end to the work-study movement, namely a refocus on traditional academically-oriented education programs. Halpern (1994) indicated that the "demise of career education as a federal initiative occurred in 1982" (p. 116).

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The end of the career education movement as a federal initiative was due to the repeal of the federal Career Education Implementation Incentive Act in 1982 (Halpern, 1994). This ended the encouragement and implementation of career education planning. Although there were good intentions to enforce the importance of career education, it was another educational movement brought to an end due to the influence of federal policy impacted by funding priorities.

As the career education movement was ending in the early 1980s, the transition movement was being ushered in by another federal initiative in 1983 "when the United States Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) published its now famous position paper on transition" (Halpern, 1994, p. 116). This was the seminal paper published by Madeleine Will (1984), the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). Will presented the "bridges" model that promoted the move from high school to postsecondary employment for youth with disabilities (Cimera, 2000; Halpern, 1994).

In this model, three bridges were presented to assist youth with disabilities as they moved from school to employment. The first bridge involved "movement from school either without services or with only those that are available to the population at large" (Will, 1984, p. 5). The second had time-limited services "designed to lead to independent employment at the termination of service" (Will, 1984, p. 5). The third bridge had ongoing services for individuals with disabilities "who do not move to unsupported work roles" (Will, 1984, p. 5). The bridge model created the foundation for the beginning of the transition movement.

While the publication of the Will paper in 1984 is the commonly cited version of how the special education transition movement formally began, the movement's emergence was also strongly influenced by other federal policies and programs. Williams and O'Leary (2001) stated:

The genesis for ensuring that youth with disabilities are provided with the transition services necessary for moving from the school to post-school activities consistent with their needs, preferences, and interests can be traced to Public Law 98-199, Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1983 (EHA). This legislation introduced the federal government's initiative to address the needs of youth transitioning from school. (p. 51)

Furthermore, Kochhar-Bryant et al., (2007) indicated that the EHA Amendments of 1983 "encouraged states and local school districts to voluntarily develop transition supports and services for youths with disabilities" (p. 11). More importantly, the EHA Amendments of 1983 provided the funding for model demonstration programs, research efforts, and personnel preparation projects to develop school-to-work transition services (Kohler & Field, 2003; Repetto & Correa, 1996; Rusch & Phelps, 1987). For example, from 1984 to 1986, $5 million was authorized by EHA 1983 to be spent on improving post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities plus an additional $6 million was authorized annually for grants (Alwell & Cobb, 2006). The funding supported the bridges model, which allowed researchers and educators to advocate for the importance of research-based services based on data.

Additional evidence about the origins of the transition movement comes from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS), a study of over 8,000 youth with disabilities. Blackorby and Wagner (1996) noted the following about the federal role in the study's origins: "This study, congressionally mandated in 1983, was sponsored by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education" (p. 401). Clearly, with the mandating of NLTS in the early 1980s, federal legislation played an early role in the gathering of data regarding the post school outcomes of youth with disabilities. Improving the post school

outcomes of youth with disabilities is the purpose of the transition movement. The data collected through NLTS was used to analyze both the post school outcomes of youth with disabilities and to influence transition planning at the policy, funding and implementation level.

Arguably, however, initial policy groundwork for the transition movement probably began several years prior to the passage of the EHA 1983 Amendments. Beginning as early as 1977, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) released a federal policy report that had examined the barriers presented to youth who were making the transition from secondary school to work or postsecondary education (Kochhar-Bryant et al., 2007). In that same year, the Youth Employment and Demonstration Projects Act of 1977 was passed to facilitate the transition from school to work for all youth, and particularly those from special populations such as youth who were economically disadvantaged, were in correctional settings, or had disabilities (Kochhar-Bryant et al., 2007). While these efforts were directed at youth in general, and not specifically at youth with disabilities, they reinforced the importance of the transition movement and its initial focus on employment.

Unquestionably, federal policy played a pivotal role in determining and expanding the course for transition education and services. For example, federal policy supported a series of national follow-up and follow-along studies beginning in the mid-1980s which subsequently documented the poor post-secondary outcomes for youth with disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Mithaug, Horiuchi, & Fanning, 1985; Sitlington, Frank, & Carson, 1992). This research helped to broaden the definition of transition from a one-dimensional focus on employment to a multi dimensional perspective that included "postsecondary education, independent living, community participation, and social and interpersonal relationships" (Sitlington & Clark, 2006, p. 18). In sum, the studies showed that

youth with disabilities were experiencing poor postsecondary outcomes in many areas of life beyond that of employment, which had been the original focus of transition policies.

Follow-up and follow-along studies, however, accomplished more than broadening the definition of transition (Neubert, 2006). Their findings impacted later revisions of federal policy. For instance, the EHA 1986 not only reauthorized funding for model demonstration programs that were first introduced in 1983, but also continued the funding for research studies to investigate the postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities (Neubert, 2006). Critically, studies provided additional documentation which helped lead Congress to make the decision to mandate transition services for students with disabilities when the EHA was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 (Repetto & Correa, 1996).

2.2   IDEA 1990: THE FIRST FEDERAL TRANSITION MANDATE

The reauthorization of IDEA in 1990 was important because it was "the first federal legislation mandating that a statement of needed transition services be included in students' IEPs" (Neubert, 2006, p. 39). IDEA 1990 included a section where "a requirement is stipulated that transition planning as part of the Individualized Education Program must occur for all [all italics original] students with disabilities no later than age 16" (Halpern, 1994, p. 117). The inclusion of this regulation meant that written documents could be examined to determine if mandates were being complied with by the entities (i.e., LEAs) responsible for implementing them.   The new mandates and regulations required LEAS to be monitored by the SEA for transition compliance through paperwork review.

IDEA 1990 not only issued the mandate for transition services, but also provided financial support. The 1990 reauthorization included the provision for five-year systems change grants to support states as they implemented transition services. "Between 1991 and 1996, forty-five states received state systems change grants. These grants averaged approximately $500,000 per year for five years" (Williams & O'Leary, 2001, p. 52). These grants provided funding for states to develop strategies to implement the IDEA 1990 transition mandates. Specifically, the monies in the grants went to the SEAs so they could develop strategies that supported LEAs to implement transition services. To ensure compliance with IDEA 1990, federal regulations were released in 1992. Turnbull and colleagues (2007) have explained why regulations were needed:

> Rarely does Congress or even a state legislature enact a law that covers with sufficient specificity all of the individuals or entities to which it applies. Accordingly, executive agencies issue regulations to assist governed individuals and entities to know how to comply with the law. (p. 10)

Following the release of the regulations, the federal government, through OSEP, began monitoring the implementation of the transition provisions by SEAs, including SEA policies and procedures (Williams & O'Leary, 2001).

Another critical advance that emerged from the 1990 reauthorization was the federal definition of transition services, which moved beyond a sole focus of employment. The new definition for transition services was:

> A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent

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living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (IDEA 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 et seq.)

This legislative definition was closer to the broad professional position that had been put forward by the field (Halpern, 1994). Nonetheless, the issue of transition assessment remained an implied component of transition.

2.3   IDEA 1997: CHANGES TO FEDERAL TRANSITION MANDATE

When IDEA was reauthorized in 1997, it maintained the definition of transition services from IDEA 1990, but added a provision that the "coordinated set of activities" could include related services such as counseling services or orientation and mobility (Neubert, 2006). In addition, IDEA 1997 introduced several critical changes. First, it required transition services to begin at age 14 instead of age 16, a change that was widely praised by the field (Clark, 2007). Second, IDEA 1997 mandated interagency collaboration to coordinate and plan transition services (Kochhar-Bryant, 2003). IDEA 1997 accomplished this by requiring that IEPs contain a statement regarding interagency responsibilities or any linkages needed to agencies outside of the LEA; moreover, if the outside agencies failed to provide the transition services designated in the IEP, then the IEP team was required to meet again to identify how those transition services would be met (Kochhar-Bryant, et al., 2007).

IDEA 1997 also required that students with disabilities be included in state and district assessments along with their peers in the general population (Neubert, 2006). While not explicitly impacting transition, this requirement foreshadowed the heavy emphasis on assessment that would be seen in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, and particularly on assessment used for accountability in the area of academic subjects. This is an important point when considering the issue of how to define "transition assessment."

Transition assessment is "the ongoing process of collecting data on the individual's needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, educational, living, and personal and social environments" (Sitlington, et al., 1997, p. 70- 71). For instance, one question raised by the mandates in IDEA 1997 and in NCLB was whether transition assessment should focus primarily on academic achievement or include other areas of adult life.

While IDEA 1997 strengthened the transition provisions, the issue of transition assessment still remained an implied set of activities. Moreover, IDEA 1997 placed a heavy emphasis on assessment for accountability and on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum.

2.4   IDEA 2004: ARTICULATING TRANSITION ASSESSMENT

The earlier transition provisions in IDEA 1990 and IDEA 1997 focused on transition processes that led to an outcome-oriented approach. The IDEA 2004 transition provisions shifted the language from outcome-oriented to results-oriented (Turnbull et al., 2007). O'Leary (2006) stated that people were confused by the term outcome-oriented process, and consequently

struggled with identifying post-school outcomes. IDEA 1997 required that transition plans include postsecondary outcomes for postsecondary education, employment and independent living areas. However, the change in 2004 to results-oriented meant that we had to develop specific measurable postsecondary education, employment and independent living goals that could be measured when the student graduated. This change from outcome-oriented planning to results-oriented planning meant that data could now be collected and analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of transition services.

The IDEA 2004 transition provisions called for measurable postsecondary goals to be developed based upon age-appropriate transition assessments. This change strengthened the accountability for transition services. It would no longer be enough to develop transition plans, link with outside agencies, and provide a coordinated set of transition activities. Transition services and planning would be held accountable. Transition needs to result in not just setting post secondary goals but students achieving measurable education, employment and independent living post secondary goals. O'Leary (2006) noted, "The emphasis on a results-oriented process aligns the language in IDEA to the language and intent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which focuses on improved results" (p. 4). SEAs and LEAs would now be required to collect post school outcome data on students and analyze the data to determine the effectiveness of transition planning/services.

The IDEA 2004 transition definition stated that transition services were to be within a results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student with a disability to facilitate the student's movement from school to post-school activities (IDEA 2004, sec.614). "Academic and functional achievement" is a key term in the

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legislation. Clearly, the legislative definition for transition points out that the focus of transition assessment and transition planning must go beyond academic achievement.

As SEAs and LEAs strive to implement the federal mandates, true compliance with the intent of the mandates often takes time. For example, while the IDEA 1990 and IDEA 1997 transition mandates strengthened transition services, these same mandates forced school districts to address transition planning for all students with disabilities, not just those with the most significant disabilities. Consequently, this legislation vastly increased the number of students who had to be provided with transition services. To achieve compliance, many school districts responded by adding the requirements for transition services onto existing IEP forms. But "these forms generally did not focus on assessment of transition strengths, needs, interests, and preferences as part of the 'present level of educational performance' for goal setting" (Clark, 2007, p. 4). As a result, student's postsecondary goals were not based on the individual student's interests, abilities, strengths, individual preferences or weaknesses. A successful transition to employment, postsecondary education and independent living environment requires goals and services to be based on the individual student. LEAs and IEP teams were not using the data/information they knew about individual students to develop transition plans. The transition components of IEPs were being completed without the use of any comprehensive transition assessment procedures. IDEA 2004, however, clarified this matter by mandating that transition planning be based upon assessment of the students' academic and functional strengths, needs, preferences, and interests. Unfortunately, no set guidelines to acquire the necessary information that is needed to create an effective transition plan were mandated, thus reinforcing a disconnect between policy and procedure.

2.5 HOW SEAS RESPONDEED TO THE IDEA 2004 TRANSITION ASSESSMENT MANDATE

Morningstar and Liss examined the issue of how SEAs have responded to the IDEA 2004 age appropriate transition assessments mandate in a study (2008). In this study, 36 states responded to a survey sent to all 51 SEAs, including the District of Columbia, during the summer and fall of 2006. Of 36 respondents, 29 (81%) were SEA transition coordinators, 3 (8%) were directors or assistant directors of special education, and 4 (11%) identified themselves in the "other" category (e.g., consultants, professors, program coordinators). Two-thirds (66%), or 24 of the SEAs, indicated they had discussed the issue of defining the IDEA 2004 requirements for age appropriate transition assessments. In response to the question, "Has your SEA implemented any new policies that define or interpret age appropriate transition assessments?" only five respondents (16%) reported that new state policies had been developed while 26 (84%) respondents reported they had not.

Thirty-two states responded to the question, "Does your SEA interpret the new requirements for age appropriate transition assessments in the same manner as an evaluation or tri-annual reevaluation?" Of these, 10 (31%) responded, "Yes" and 22 (69%) responded "No." One revealing point behind this question is that SEAs found themselves in a position where they had to interpret the age appropriate transition assessments provision prior to engaging in the implementation process. The second point is that SEAs were interpreting the provision along lines consistent with either the psychoeducational orientation or the vocational evaluation orientation. While the professional position of the field clearly aligns with the vocational orientation, 31%, nearly one third of respondents, had taken the psychoeducational orientation. The psychoeducational approach does not incorporate the experience, knowledge and insight of

the entire student's IEP team. The psychoeducational approach is something that is administered to the student and interpreted by another individual. The vocational approach actively involves the student in both informal and formal assessments and encourages both student reflection and IEP member reflection and interpretation.

What this study further revealed was that policy implementation takes considerable time. In terms of how this time is spent, this, specifically, was a case where Congress did not provide a definition for a federal mandate, and consequently, the SEAs had to first interpret the mandate before beginning its implementation. The results of this study showed that while a discussion of the age appropriate transition assessments mandate had occurred by many SEAs two years after the reauthorization only a few had policy or guidance documents in place (Morningstar & Liss, 2008).

2.6   DEFINING TRANSITION ASSESSMENT

Leconte (2006) pointed out that "assessment of any type constitutes a process of gathering information to make a decision" (p. 115). In the area of transition, this means collecting information to assist individuals with the transitions that occur at the critical point of school to adulthood. Neubert (2003) noted that transition assessment has evolved over time. Transition assessment has incorporated a variety of procedures that were used in other fields including: "career education, vocational assessment and evaluation, career and technology education, vocational rehabilitation, and curriculum-based assessment (Sitlington, et al.,2007, p. 2). The assessment can be both informal and formal assessment examining the students' abilities. Many formal assessments are provided through computer-based programs that allow teachers and

students to see a variety of employment interests as well as areas of behavior that need more training.

A prominent definition of transition assessment is the one endorsed by the Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC):

The ongoing process of collecting data on the individual's needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, education, living, and personal and social environments. Assessment data serves as the common thread in the transition process and form the basis for defining goals and services to be included in the Individualized Education Program (IEP). (Sitlington et al., 1997, p. 70-71)

The on-going assessment ensures that the transition goals are defined and evolve as a student evolves through the transition process. The IEP team should review the data and make necessary changes to IEP and transition plan as the student acquires new skills and abilities.

Federal law requires "appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills" (§300.320[b][1]). Although states are still developing policy and guidance documents relative to transition assessment (Morningstar & Liss, 2008), it seems most appropriate to use some combination of the following types: paper and pencil tests, structured student and family interviews, community or work-based assessments (situational) and curriculum-based assessments. These assessments or procedures come in two general formats – formal and informal. Informal measures may include interviews or questionnaires, direct observations, anecdotal records, environmental or situational analysis, curriculum-based assessments, interest inventories, preference assessments, and transition planning inventories. Formal measures include adaptive behavior and independent living assessments, aptitude tests,

interest assessments, intelligence tests, achievement tests, personality or preference tests, career development measures, on the job or training evaluations, and measures of self-determination.

The transition assessment process can be viewed within a framework. The DCDT definition and framework were defined by Sitlington, Neubert, and Leconte (1997). Their framework incorporates a variety of methods for assessing the student and potential work, training or educational environment. Analyses of results help educators make decisions about how best to match a student with their potential training or job environment. The purpose of the framework is to identify training and post school options that match the students' interests, preferences, and needs. In the first step (assess), educators assess the students' interests, preferences, and needs related to desired post school outcomes using formal and informal assessments. The second step (plan) involves interpreting the results from these assessments and incorporating them into the students' IEP. In the third step (instruct), students learn the skills they will need to reach their post school goals. In the last step (evaluate), the IEP team evaluates whether progress has been made toward achieving the transition activities and corresponding IEP goals and objectives.

This DCDT definition and framework reflects a position that is based upon a broad view of transition. Importantly, however, it is not the federal legislative definition. Indeed, Clark (2007) warned, "if we let federal initiatives, legislation, or definitions shape our understanding of the word transition (italics original), we may allow those perspectives to limit our thinking about assessment" (p. 1). For example, Clark (2007) has indicated that individuals go through multiple transitions, and thus he described transition assessment as "appropriate multiple assessments for particular transitions throughout life" (p. 1). Based upon this perspective of multiple transitions, Clark (2007) has added another definition to the field:

Transitions assessment is a process of obtaining, organizing, and using information to assist all individuals with disabilities of all ages and their families in making all critical transitions in those individuals' lives both successful and satisfying (p. 2).

This definition is one that is extremely broad as it defines transition assessment across the life span and focuses on helping individuals with disabilities to achieve quality lives. This can be accomplished, according to Clark, because a "transitions-referenced assessment process actively engages the parents and the student in the educational process in a way that psychoeducational testing does not" (p. 74).

Halpern (1994) incorporated the student as a critical member of the transition assessment process. He argued that the student must be taught how to be an active participant who can perform self-assessments and who can interpret the meaning of these assessments as well as those that have been administered by others. He framed his perspective in the following way:

The idea of self-evaluation does not imply that we should discard the rigor of traditional assessments, but rather that we should dramatically alter the locus of interpretation from the examiner to the person being assessed. Unlike typical evaluation procedures where people are told by others how well or how poorly they perform, the assessment procedures that accompany transition planning should involve teaching students with disabilities how to evaluate themselves, taking into consideration a variety of assessment areas and findings. In those instances where the student's cognitive disability is too severe to permit this, the locus of control should still be shifted to the parent whenever possible [all italics original]. (p. 118-119)

This student-focused perspective has continued to serve as a foundation followed by the professional field. Quite simply, Sitlington and colleagues (2007) have said that, "The most important person in the transition assessment process is the student" (p. 66). The students need

to interpret the results of the assessments rather than a psychologist or educator and use the results to plan. This is in contrast to academic assessments that are selected by the teacher, often administered to a student and interpreted by the teacher. Transition assessments need to actively engage the student beginning with selection of the procedures and ending with interpretation of the results as they relate to that student's individual goal setting and transition planning.

While IDEA 1990 did not specifically mandate transition assessment, Neubert (2003) explained how the mandates contained in IDEA 1990 related to the student invitation to the IEP meeting when transition services were discussed, and that the IEP must consider the student's needs, preferences, and interests which "all point to the need for students to have greater choice in assessment and transition-planning activities" (p. 65). Similarly, Sitlington and colleagues (2007) pointed out how the IDEA 1990 "legislation addressed assessment and self-determination by requiring that the statement of transition services be based on students' needs and interests and that students be invited to IEP meetings when transition services were discussed" (p. 4). It would appear that the professional position of the field took a clear stance on the need for transition assessment while the IDEA 1990 legislative position on transition assessment remained far more implicit.

The authorization of IDEA 2004, for the first time, provided an explicit mandate for transition assessment. The provision reads as follows:

> Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16, and updated annually thereafter—(a) appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills; (IDEA 2004, Sec. 614)

With regard to this, Sitlington and colleagues (2007) stated, "IDEA 2004 contains specific provisions related to transition assessment and the development of an IEP. It clearly mandates transition assessment as the basis for the transition services that are included in the IEP" (p. 45). In terms of timing, these researchers pointed out how transition assessment must happen prior to the development of the IEP because "transition assessment is the foundation upon which the transition components of the IEP are developed" (p. 46). Moreover, because IDEA 2004 also mandated that age appropriate transition assessments be used to develop measurable postsecondary goals, this changed the focus of the IEP to a broader adult-based perspective. We must ensure that we take what we know about a student and develop measurable education, employment and independent living goals. Our transition activities must prepare them to enter their future living, learning and working environments.

One unfortunate drawback to the IDEA 2004 mandate for transition assessments was that it did not sufficiently define the term. Turnbull, et al., (2007) have indicated, "Sometimes Congress will define its terms . . .. Sometimes, however, it will not, usually when it wants to declare general principles or outcomes and leave their meaning to be determined through regulations, research, or practice" (p. 12).

Therefore, with regard to transition assessment, the interpretation of the term has rested in the hands of those who have had to interpret its meaning and implement it. This has included state and local education agency personnel such as transition specialists, education attorneys, school administrators, and special education teachers. Leconte (2006) reported the following: "Recently, representatives from several states began questioning how to interpret the new language in IDEA 2004 regarding evaluation, age-appropriate assessment, and transition assessment" (p. 116).

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As the field has begun to interpret the transition assessments mandate, one area of controversy has arisen from the fact that two theoretical orientations have been used to define its meaning. Leconte (2006) identified these two orientations as: (a) the psycho-educational orientation and (b) the vocational assessment and evaluation orientation. These two approaches can lead to fundamentally different interpretations of policy and practice with regard to transition assessment.

The psychoeducational orientation defines transition assessment as a diagnostic procedure that is performed as an annual or triennial assessment. Ultimately, however, the assessment is static. It is a deficit-based approach that focuses on student needs and relies heavily upon standardized tests as the instruments used to conduct evaluations. It is a professional-centered approach with the focus on the personnel who administer and interpret tests on behalf of students with disabilities, with the major purpose of determining eligibility for special education services and prescribing methods on how to appropriately implement those services (e.g., accommodations). As such, the transition assessment within the psychoeducational theoretical orientation is defined as a diagnostic and prescriptive event (Leconte, 2006).

The vocational assessment and evaluation orientation views assessment as a continuous and on-going process (Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2003; Sitlington & Clark, 2007). It is a strengths-based approach that includes student needs, preferences, interests, and goals. It is also a person-centered approach with the focus on the student who receives the assessment information. Specifically, it involves the student in the decision-making processes that ultimately lead to post-school goals. Additionally, transition assessment is defined as an intervention that promotes self-determination for students with disabilities (Leconte, 2006). As

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such, transition assessment within this theoretical orientation is defined as an on-going process that uses a broad array of assessments across all major life domains.

The question, then, is whether transition assessment will be interpreted by State Educational Agencies (SEAs) and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) within the psychoeducational or the vocational assessment and evaluation orientation. If transition assessment is seen as belonging under the psychoeducational orientation, then it may be interpreted as a testing mechanism for eligibility and compliance functions, which could mean that transition assessment would be viewed as occurring only on a tri-annual basis for students with disabilities (Leconte, 2006). On the other hand, if it falls under the vocational assessment and evaluation orientation, then it may be interpreted as an ongoing process that is updated on a yearly basis while focusing on a student's postsecondary goals. In summary, because both orientations represent important perspectives, the national controversy has pointed out how the field needs additional guidance to better understand the meaning of assessment for transition.

2.7   TRANSITION ASSESSMENT AND THE SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE (SOP)

Another development in IDEA 2004 has added additional importance to the transition assessment process. IDEA 2004 mandated a Summary of Performance (SOP) that is intended to facilitate the movement from secondary school to employment, higher education, or other postsecondary areas of life for youth with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Interestingly, the IDEA 2004 regulations for the SOP may have provided a policy mandate for a

unified orientation toward transition assessment that incorporates the psychoeducational and the vocational assessment and evaluation orientations.

That is, the SOP mandate calls for "a summary of the child's academic achievement and functional performance" (IDEA, 2004, Sec. 614). An argument can be made that the provision of a summary of academic and functional areas will require information from both assessment orientations. For example, to develop a SOP for a student, both formal and informal assessment data should be gathered. On this topic, Madaus, Bigaj, Chafouleas, and Simonsen (2006) stated:

The Summary of Performance (SOP) presents an unprecedented opportunity to send the student into postsecondary environments with a document that may bridge the gap between the results of standardized assessments and actual performance as measured by a variety of informal assessment data in a variety of contexts. (p. 90)

While the requirements for a SOP should signal the field that there is a need for a more integrated and comprehensive approach to transition assessment, at this point in time additional research is needed to determine the direction SEAs and LEAs are taking in the development of policies, guidance documents, and other resources to fulfill the requirements for the SOP mandate, as the federal SOP mandate does not clearly define the requirements.

One concern with the SOP mandate, however, is that it may limit the types of transition assessments provided to students with disabilities. Prior to IDEA 2004, state and local education agencies generally followed the procedure that students with disabilities would receive a comprehensive evaluation every three years. While a reevaluation must still occur every three years, under the changes made in IDEA 2004 it is no longer required for students who are exiting school. This has raised concerns. For example, Shaw (2006) made the following comment:

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The new SOP requirement in IDEA 2004 seems intended to preclude the need for transition evaluation. Instead of calling for a comprehensive evaluation for students who are about to exit school due to graduation or exceeding age eligibility, IDEA 2004 now calls for an SOP. (p. 110)

Kochhar-Bryant and Izzo (2006) wrote that the "IDEA 2004 eliminated high schools' responsibility for a final comprehensive reevaluation but required an SOP, although its details are undefined and unspecified in current legislation" (p. 71). Consequently, additional research is needed to see how SEAs and LEAs are implementing the new legislative mandate for the SOP, particularly in reference to how they are connecting it to the mandate for age appropriate transition assessments.

2.8   TRANSITION POLICY INFORMATION: SEAS AND LEAS

While the 1980s were a decade when a great deal of attention was paid to developing transition policies, programs, and services (Furney, et al., 1997), the EHA Amendments of 1983 and 1986 did not include specific mandates for transition planning; consequently, "state and local education agencies were allowed to develop and fund transition services at their own discretion" (Neubert, 2006, p. 38). But the IDEA 1990 mandates for transition planning changed this approach. Critically, when IDEA 1990 mandated transition services it meant that both SEAs and LEAs would be monitored for compliance. The matter of compliance, in turn, brings into question how the transition mandates would be implemented by the executive agencies that had this responsibility.

To better understand why policy implementation is such a lengthy process, it must be recognized that government executive agencies are situated within a tiered system (Turnbull, et al., 2007). At one tier, there is the U.S. Department of Education that is the federal executive agency. At the next tier, there are the state departments of education or state education agencies (SEAs). Last, at the third tier, there are local school districts or local education agencies (LEAs). Information flows from the U.S. Department of Education to the SEAs, and then from the SEAs to the LEAs. But there is a cyclical aspect to this process in that some information, such as special education monitoring data, must be reported from the LEAs to the SEAs, and then to the U.S. Department of Education. IDEA requires that each SEA submit information to the U.S. Department of Education that includes program information and state performance plans which are then used by the Department of Education to monitor the SEAs (Turnbull et al., 2007). Through this federal monitoring process, the SEAs are then identified as being at one of the following four levels in meeting the requirements of IDEA (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1416(d)(2)):

1. Meets its requirements and purposes

2. Needs assistance in implementing its requirements

3. Needs intervention in implementing it requirements

4. Needs substantial intervention in implementing its requirements

If an SEA meets IDEA's requirements, then no further actions are needed. But when an SEA "needs assistance," "needs intervention," or "needs substantial intervention," then the Secretary of Education can take various steps to ensure compliance with IDEA (Turnbull et al., 2007). These steps include measures such as offering resources for technical assistance to an SEA, imposing sanctions on the use of federal funds by an SEA, or referring the enforcement procedures to the Department of Justice.

Similarly, within the tiered system, the SEAs also have executive agency enforcement powers and responsibilities. SEAs must ensure that LEAs are complying with the requirements in IDEA. If LEAs fail to meet the requirements, then the SEAs have various enforcement powers at their disposal including the placing of restrictions on the federal funds designated for the LEAs, including the withholding of the funds (Turnbull et al., 2007).

2.9   THE IDEA 1990 TRANSITION MANDATES: COMPLIANCE ISSUES

In a study of how the IDEA 1990 mandates were being implemented in LEAs in Ohio in 1993, Baer, et al., (1996) found that compliance with the IDEA mandates was highest in area of procedures as "nearly 90% of the respondents reported the existence of a transition plan . . . but less than 50% reported transition services were being made available as required" (p. 69). In sum, the researchers concluded that LEAs "were simply complying with the paperwork requirements of IDEA" (1996, p. 69). An important consideration, however, was that the timeframe needed for policies to result in changes may often exceed five years, which, in some cases, may even pass beyond the life cycle of a policy itself (DeStefano, Hasazi, & Trach, 1996). This point was especially relevant with regard to the Baer and colleagues study in that the responses of LEA personnel was only three years after the enactment of IDEA 1990, and only one year after the IDEA federal regulations were released in 1992.

Williams and O'Leary (2001), however, did examine how well states were meeting the IDEA 1990 transition service requirements over a longer period of time. These investigators examined OSEP's findings concerning all "entities receiving IDEA-Part B monies between 1993 and 1997" (p. 55). They found that many states were out of compliance in numerous transition

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service areas such as, failing to invite students to IEP meetings when transition would be under discussion, and failing to invite adult agencies to participate in transition planning. In summary, the researchers noted that "the findings of this study indicate that the key elements that have consistently been identified as critical for effective transition services continue not to be in place within secondary schools throughout the country" (p. 64).

As authorized under IDEA 1990, the federal government provided funds to assist SEAs with the implementation of the IDEA transition mandates (Johnson & Halloran, 1997). One source of funding was the State Systems for Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities Initiative, often referred to as the transition systems change initiative (Guy & Johnson, 1997). It was initiated in 1991 by the U.S. Department of Education through the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), and it offered competitively awarded grants to states over a five-year period (Cobb & Johnson, 1997). A total of 45 states received grants at which time each of the respective SEAs then assumed responsibility for developing strategies and procedures to implement the transition service requirements in IDEA 1990. After the grant period had elapsed, DeStefano and colleagues (1997), who had evaluated the transition systems change initiative, warned that it is an error to believe that policy implementation is "a homogenous and unified process" (p. 124). The researchers further stated that educational governance in the United States was highly influenced both by local control and by a large amount of variability across and within states. Moreover, "in many cases, federal policy filters unpredictably through multiple intermediate layers of discretion and is shaped by preexisting cultures and agendas, which results in recognizably different versions of the same initiative (DeStefano et al., 1997, p. 124). Johnson and Guy (1997) also discussed the challenges of implementing the transition systems change initiative:

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From the work of these [grant] projects, we know that transition systems change is not a stepwise or linear process in which one activity, or one set of activities, results in a permanent or stable change or improvement in policy, interagency cooperation, and/or the provision of appropriate programs and services (p. 192).

The key component to successful systems change was that implementation was achieved by individuals who were committed to bringing about changes that benefited students with disabilities and their families (Johnson & Guy, 1997). Numerous additional strategies and procedures were identified including: (a) involving all stakeholders or stakeholder systems, (b) accounting for state and local goals, (c) providing flexibility to allow for changed goals or new goals, (d) allowing state agencies to develop their own models of change, and (e) using evaluation information (DeStefano et al., 1997; Guy & Shriner, 1997; Johnson & Guy, 1997)

Furney and colleagues (1997) examined how three states implemented the IDEA 1990 transition mandates. The investigators found that while policy implementation was a complex process, the three states in the study were able to find ways to successfully bring about change in order to implement the federal transition mandates. The researchers found seven themes across the three states that led to success:

1. The role of shared values and beliefs in creating an environment conducive to the implementation of the transition policies and practices.

2. Using direct policy approaches to create changes related to transition.

3. Paving the way for change by uniting leadership and advocacy.

4. Building collaborative structures to promote systemic change.

5. Using the results of research and evaluation to inform change efforts.

6. Building capacity to sustain the implementation.

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7. Looking ahead: Linking transition to other restructuring efforts. (p. 348)

In another study by the same investigators, the focus moved to an examination of policy implementation at the local level (Hasazi, et al., 1999). The implementation of the IDEA 1990 transition mandates was studied at nine local sites. Five of these were "model sites" with a national reputation for successful implementation of transition policies and practices, while the other four "representative sites" were showing progress in the implementation process. This study found that "the federal mandate for transition planning and services had played a critical role in promoting the establishment and continuation of promising transition practices" (p. 562). But when comparing the model sites and representative sites, it was found that the model sites provided more supports for implementation, and this, in turn, led to "widespread and systemic use of promising transition-related practices" (p. 562). In contrast, the representative sites had fewer supports or strategies in place and they were less widespread. For example, these sites had not developed comprehensive models of interagency collaboration. But the researchers found factors that supported implementation in both model and representative sites. In model sites, the factors included:

1. Use of system-wide, student and family-centered strategies

2. Fostering of effective and substantive interagency collaboration

3. Facilitation of systemic professional development

4. Visionary and inclusive leadership

5. Coordinated and integrated educational reform efforts

6. Establishment of connections between local and federal transition initiatives

In representative sites, the factors included:

1. Caring for and commitment to students with disabilities and their families

2. Specific programs jointly funded by schools and agencies

3. Targeted professional development activities (p. 564).

Nonetheless, one common theme found in all nine sites was "the positive impact of the federal transition mandate" (p. 557). Part of this impact was that the federal mandate provided the "legal clout" needed to bring about change.

2.10   CONCLUSION

The most recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, retitled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), strengthened the transition requirements by including specific language regarding age appropriate transition assessments. Research indicates that strengthening of the transition service requirements is needed to help students with disabilities to achieve successful postsecondary outcomes. When the language for the IDEA 2004 transition assessments mandate was released, a definition for "transition assessment" was not provided. The need remains to examine how local education agencies have defined and implemented the federal transition requirements, specifically the age appropriate transition assessments mandate, since this is the first time it has been written into the federal law.

This study examined how educators experienced implementing policies required by IDEA, with a concentration on age appropriate transition assessment. There is a requirement by law that SEAs and LEAs have policies; unfortunately, there is a dearth of information regarding implementation of those policies. Through this study, the researcher hoped to gain an understanding as to what LEA transition coordinators experienced when asked to implement

transition assessments, policies and guidelines.   When provided with the same guidance from their SEA, why are some school districts able to implement age appropriate transition assessment practices and others continue to struggle?   As the LEAs in past research have focused on procedures and compliance will we find the same with the LEAs surveyed in 2016?

3.0   METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine how local education agencies (LEAs) in Pennsylvania have responded to the age appropriate transition assessments mandate introduced in IDEIA 2004. The study sought to identify the perceptions of LEA transition coordinators from one state regarding the policies and practices that have been developed and the supports and challenges that have been encountered by their respective LEAs with the implementation of the age appropriate transition assessments provisions. The research questions included the following:

1. What is age appropriate transition assessment? How has your LEA interpreted it?

2.   What policies and practices have been put in place at the local district level with regard to the age appropriate transition assessments language in IDEIA 2004?

3. How are exemplary LEA practices and policies being developed and implemented?

4. What are the factors that either promote or inhibit your LEA in the implementation of policies and practices regarding the age appropriate transition mandate?

3.1   STUDY DESIGN

This study utilized an online survey tool (Qualtrics) and selected follow up telephone interviews to collect the data to answer the research questions. The survey responses themselves were anonymous.   Upon completion of the survey, participants were directed to a separate website on

which they could provide personal information in order to receive a $25 payment for completing the survey. The Quatrics survey software tracked IP addresses so that all participants could only participate once from the same computer. Participants were able to email the researcher directly with any questions regarding the survey. Participants could also indicate a willingness to participate in a follow-up telephone interview with the researcher. Follow up telephone interviews were conducted with a random selection of 12% of those who volunteered. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

3.2   PARTICIPANTS

Participants in this study were identified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education as the local education agency's district level transition coordinator. Transition coordinators are employed by a local education agency with direct responsibility for the area of transition assessment and transition planning. The transition coordinators are the professionals who have been "doing the work" of developing transition plans for secondary students based on age appropriate transition assessment. They represent a school district's professional staff most likely to be involved in interpreting and implementing transition policies and procedures. The Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network compiled a 2015-2016 Secondary Transition Directory. The directory includes the names and email addresses for the identified transition coordinator of every school district in the state. The survey was sent to transition coordinators at all 519 school districts in the directory. One hundred eighty-six emails were undeliverable because the email address listed in the directory was incorrect. By contacting the Intermediate Unit Transition

Consultant for each of these 186 school districts, an effort was made to obtain current email addresses. Through this, 14 email addresses could be corrected. In the end, a total of 347 surveys were sent out to transition coordinators across the state of Pennsylvania.

Participants were asked to provide information related to their position in their school district, years they had been a transition coordinator, percentage of time devoted to transition, location of school district, information related to their community setting, information related to student population, and percentage of students fully included within the general education curriculum.

3.3   PROCEDURES

The survey used in this study gathered information and perceptions of transition coordinators' experience and perceptions of implementing the age appropriate transition assessment mandate. The first section of the survey included demographic information. The second section included approaches taken to understand the transition assessment mandate, implementation of the transition assessment mandate, LEA's perceptions of the transition assessment mandate, barriers to implementation, identification of best practices, identification of those who collaborate with the implementation of the transition assessment mandate, and identification of additional training and guidance needed to implement the transition assessment mandate. (Please see Appendix A for survey questions).

To ensure the confidentiality, survey responses were anonymous. A survey link was sent to each participant via email and the survey was completed through the Qualtircs software system. In that same initial email, participants were informed that the data collected in this study

was to be used for the researcher's doctoral dissertation and possibly other publications in educational journals.

The intent of this study was to discover how age appropriate transition assessment was implemented at the local level. This study investigated the factors that support or inhibit conducting age appropriate transition assessment. What is age appropriate transition assessment? How is it interpreted? What has occurred at the local district level with policies and practices with regard to the age appropriate transition assessments language in IDEA 2004? What exemplary LEA practices and policies have been developed and implemented? What are the factors that either promoted or inhibited LEAs in the implementation of policies and practices with regard to the age appropriate transition assessment mandate?

3.4   DATA COLLECTION

Requests for transition coordinators to complete the study were sent to participants via email with an anonymous survey link. (Please see Appendix B for letter) On February 1, 2016 the survey was sent to 347 transition coordinators in the state of Pennsylvania. Within a two-week period, 108 transition coordinators (31%) completed the survey. The last survey question asked for volunteers willing to discuss follow up questions in a telephone interview. Of the 108 survey participants, 42 (39%) volunteered. Follow up telephone interviews were conducted with 5 randomly selected volunteers or 12 % of respondents. (Please see Appendix C for Interview Questions)

3.5   DATA ANALYSIS

The goal of the data analysis was to understand what was important to the participants and their thoughts and perceptions about LEA policies and practices regarding the transition assessment mandate in IDEIA 2004.   Data analysis involved a two-step process of summarizing survey responses and summarizing follow-up interviews in order to verify survey responses. Frequencies of responses were calculated for the survey questions. (Creswell, 2003).   The constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998) was used to search for and identify the common remarks that led to both the development of categories and themes.   Comparisons of the participants' comments and emerging interpretations were identified.

4.0   RESULTS

4.1   RESPONDENTS BACKGROUNDS

One hundred-eight (108)-transition coordinators responded to the survey (31% response rate). Although they were all listed in the 2015-2016 Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education, Secondary Transition Directory, as their school district transition coordinator, when asked to identify their job title only 42 (39%) identified their position as transition coordinator. Among the remaining respondents, 32 (30%) identified themselves as a special education teacher, 31 (29%) as a special education director, and the final 3% as one school psychologist, one school counselor and one assistant to the superintendent). Many respondents (39%) were veteran transition coordinators:.31 (29%) for 5 to 10 years, 9 (8%) for 10 to 15 years and 2 (2%) for 16-20 years. The remainder (61%) were fairly new to the role: 50 respondents (46%) for 1 to 5 years, and 16 respondents (15%) for 1 year or less.

The majority 79 (73%) of respondents indicated that they were the only transition coordinator in their school district. The remaining respondents were in districts with more than one transition coordinator: 2 (2%) were one of 1.5 transition coordinators, 9 (8%) were one of 2 transition coordinators, 2 (2%) were one of 3 transition coordinators, 6 (6%) were one of > 3 transition coordinators, and 10 (9%) responded that they did not have a transition coordinator. Although they were listed in the Pennsylvania Secondary Transition Directory as their school

district's transition coordinator, 10 reported that their LEA did not have a transition coordinator. The majority of the respondents (91; 84%) were in districts with only one high school, but four (4%) of respondents reported two high schools, three respondents (3%) reported three high schools, 1 (1%) reported had four high schools, and nine (8%) reported more than four high schools in their school district. When they reported approximately what percentage of their time was devoted to transition, only 21 (19%) indicated that it was their 100% all day, full responsibility. Another 39 (36%) respondents spent 50% or more of their time on transition, 6 (6%) spent 75% of their time, 12 (11%) spent 50% of their time, 32 (30%) spent 20% of their time, and 37 (34%) respondents spent <20% of their time devoted to transition. Of the respondents identified by the state as transition coordinators 69 (64%) spent 20% or less of their time devoted to transition.

4.2   LEA DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Demographic data on the LEA was collected from the respondents. When asked to identify the region of Pennsylvania in which the school district was located, 34 (31%) responded eastern, 25 (23%) central, 48 (44%) western and 1 (1%) was unsure. The respondents identified the category that best described their school district: 50 (46%) self-identified as rural (a settled area outside of a town or city- population under 10,000), 50 (46%) as suburban (a residential area on the outskirts of a city - population from 10,000 to over 1,000,000) and 8 (7%) self-identified as urban (metropolitan area or city population over 1,000,000). They also reported the total student population of the high school in which they were based; 62 (57 %) were in a high school with a population of <1,000, 28 (26%) reported 1,001 < 2,000 students, 12 (11%) were reported 2,001 <

3,000, 4 (4%) reported 3,001 < 4,000 students and 2 (2%) reported total student high school enrollment as 4001 < 5,000. The percentage of these students who were classified as students with disabilities in their high school ranged considerably; 1 respondent reported (1%) <10 students with disabilities, 15 (14%) 10 -50 students with disabilities, 38 (35%) 50 - 100 students with disabilities, 18 (17%) 100 -150 students with disabilities, 11 (10%) 150 - 200 students with disabilities, 5 (5%) 200 - 250 students with disabilities and 20 (19%) responded that they had more than 250 students with disabilities who attended their high school. The majority, 50 (46%), reported that 75% of their students with disabilities were fully included in the general education curriculum. Among those respondents, 5 (5%) indicated that all of their students with disabilities were fully included in the general education curriculum, and 13 (12%) indicated that at least 50% of their students with disabilities were fully included in the general education curriculum. Eight (7%) respondents stated that 25% of their students with disabilities were fully included and 15 (17%) reported that all students with disabilities were fully included except for the students who are eligible for and take the Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment annual accountability test. Only 1(1%) responded that none of their students were fully included in the general education curriculum. These data indicated that 80% of the respondents' students spend 50% or more of their time fully included in the general education curriculum.

4.3   LEA'S RESPONSE TO THE AGE-APPROPRIATE TRANSITION ASSESSMENT MANDATE

The next part of the survey asked the respondents for the approaches that their local school district had taken to better understand the transition assessment provision of IDEA. The

respondents were able to check as many of the listed approaches as applied and could write in additional approaches not listed in the survey. The most endorsed approach indicated by 94 respondents (87%) consisted of discussions of the age appropriate transition assessment provision with colleagues in their school district. Another 88 respondents (81%) reported having received training from their Intermediate Unit on the transition assessment provision. Eighty-five respondents (79%) had involved outside agencies in the discussion of transition assessment. Eighty (74%) had communicated with other school districts on the transition assessment provision. While, 80 (74%), communicated with colleagues within their school district, only (47%) responded that they had communicated with personnel from the State on the transition assessment provision. A sizeable majority of respondents (80; 81%) had received training from their Intermediate Unit on the transition assessment provision, and 69 respondents (64%) reported that they received training from PaTTAN on the transition assessment provision. The majority surveyed endorsed that their LEA discussed the age- appropriate transition assessment mandate with colleagues in their school, received training from the intermediate unit and discussed transition assessment with outside agencies.

Only 19 respondents (18%) reported that their school district had adopted a formal definition of age-appropriate transition assessment that was shared with staff and posted in the school district's special education handbook or website. Another 43 respondents (40%) reported adoption of an informal definition of age-appropriate transition assessment that was shared with staff. Thirty-eight (38) respondents (35%) reported that their LEA had developed a procedure for identifying transition assessments. An even smaller number, 16 respondents (15%), reported that they had used information from a national organization or federal technical assistance agency such as DCDT, NTACT or NSTTAC to define transition assessment. An additional 16

respondents, (15%), reported that their LEA had hired consultants to work with district personnel to develop transition assessment practices. Only 2 (2%) responded that no action had been taken by their school district although one of these reported doing "independent research" and the other indicated, " I am not sure of everything in this category. I have only been doing this job for 2 1/2 years."

Survey respondents offered information on how their schools had responded to the age appropriate transition assessment requirements. Most respondents, 88 (81%), reported that they had developed and used an Indicator 13 checklist for the development of their students' IEPs. The majority, 86 respondents (80%), reported that they conducted transition assessments within the special education classroom. An additional majority, 65 respondents (60%), reported that they developed a transition assessment protocol for students by grade level. Over 50%, 55 respondents (51%), reported that their school district sent them to transition assessment conferences and/or professional development opportunities related to transition assessment. Less than half, 42 respondents (45%), reported that their school district had purchased additional formal transition assessment instruments. Forty (40) respondents (37%) stated that their school district had partnered with outside agencies to complete transition assessment. Although, 80% of the respondents reported that their students spend 50% or more of their time fully included in the general education curriculum, only 31 respondents (29%) reported that they conducted transition assessment within the general education classroom. Eighteen (18) respondents (17%) reported that their school district provided supplemental personnel to complete the required transition assessments. A smaller number, 14 respondents (13%), were provided with more time in their school day for transition planning. One respondent, (1%) stated that the school district had taken no action at all. Three respondents elaborated on their responses. One wrote, "In process of

identifying appropriate transition assessments," Another wrote, "We teach Pathways classes that focus on career choice. This is a requirement for all students to graduate. We use the Brigance Transition Skills Inventory to conduct transition surveys." And the third indicated, "Meet with the IU Transition Coordinator."

4.4   SEA PROVIDED POLICY AND GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS

The respondents reported on policies or guidance documents that they received from the Bureau of Special Education or the Pennsylvania Department of Education (SEA) to assist them and their LEA with implementation of the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate. The majority, 91 respondents (84%), reported that the SEA provided them with an indicator 13 checklist. Forty-five respondents (42%), reported that the SEA provided their LEA with transition assessment guidance forms and examples. Only 39 respondents (36%) reported that they had been provided with face-to-face professional development on transition assessment. The same respondents, 39 (36%) reported that the SEA had posted transition assessment guidance forms on PaTTAN/PDE website making the forms easy to access and download. And, although the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has held a state transition conference yearly, only 36 respondents (33%) reported knowing that the SEA held a Pennsylvania State Transition Conference with sessions on transition assessment.

Only 22 (20%) of the respondents indicated that they had been provided with an official definition of 'age-appropriate transition assessment' from the SEA. Only 18 respondents (17%) reported that the SEA had developed web-based tools to support them with the implementation of the transition assessment mandate. Even fewer, 8 respondents (7%), reported that the SEA

provided their school district with grants or funding for transition assessment, and 6 respondents (6%) reported that the SEA hired consultants to work with their school district on transition assessment. Three respondents acknowledged training from an IU. The remaining 6 respondents (6%) reported that no action had been taken by the SEA to assist their school district with the implementation of the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate.

4.5   AGE-APPROPRIATE TRANSITION ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION

The majority of the transition coordinator respondents (69%) reported that the implementation of the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate had changed the transition planning process, 6% reported that the mandate had no impact on the transition planning process and 25% reported that they were unable to answer. Every transition coordinator who responded to the survey (100%) reported using informal transition surveys. The next most widely used tool and procedure was interviews (used by 85%) and community-based assessments (used by 69%.) Another 56% reported that they used background information in transition assessment, and commercial tools, formal vocational evaluations, formal assessments, and work samples. (53%). Only 13% reported they they used psychometric testing for transition assessment (Table 1).

Table 1 Transition assessment tools and procedures that the LEAs used

Answer	Response	%
Informal Surveys	108	100%
Interview	92	85%
Community-Based Assessment	74	69%
Observations	73	68%
Background Information	60	56%
Commercial Tools	57	53%

Table 1 (continued)

Formal Vocational Evaluations	57	53%
Formal Assessments	57	57%
Work Samples	57	57%
Work Tasks	50	46%
Situational Assessments	36	33%
Vocational Training Analysis	32	30%
Assistive Technology Evaluation	27	25%
Psychometric Testing	14	13%

A series of survey questions asked about procedures for administration of the transition assessments. Nearly all respondents (104, 96%) reported that they administered transition assessments to each student, one on one. One respondent explained, "Because I have very limited time given to me for transition, all special education teachers give forms to their students to complete on their own and return them. Not ideal, but it is currently the only way we have." Another wrote, "It is rare that we administer these during the school day. I have a full teaching schedule which does not allow me to work with students directly on transition." A third simply stated, "Becoming more difficult." According to the survey results the majority (80%) of the LEAs' students were fully included in the general education curriculum yet only 22 respondents (20%) reported that they administered transition assessments within the general education classroom.

Of the respondents, 61 (56%) reported that all of the transition assessments they implemented with their students were documented in their students' IEPs. Another 34 respondents (31%) reported that some of the transition assessments they administered were documented in their students' IEPs. Only 13 survey respondents (12%) reported that although they administer more than one transition assessment, results of only one assessment a year is documented in their students' IEPs.

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4.6   COLLABORATION

The survey asked the transition coordinators to indicate with whom they collaborated to ensure that their transition assessment was age appropriate and on-going.   Collaborators and the numbers who selected them are provided in Table 2. By far, special educators within the school district had the largest response rate (83%), followed by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation at 81%.   Sixty-nine percent reported collaborating with family members of students with disabilities and Intermediate Unit consultants, and 68% reported collaborating with students with disabilities.

Table 2 Whom do you collaborate with to ensure transition assessment is age-appropriate and on going?

Answer	Response	%
Special educators within district	93	86%
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation	88	81%
Family members of students	74	69%
Intermediate Unit Consultants	75	69%

Table 2 (continued)

Students with disabilities	73	68%
Other transition coordinators	71	66%
Other school districts	55	51%
Other service providers	46	43%
PaTTAN consultants	42	39%
Office of Intellectual Disabilities	36	33%
Office of Behavioral Health	24	22%
Other	6	6%
None	1	1%

Another survey question asked respondents from whom they received any positive or negative feedback on their transition assessment process. The responses were varied quite varied (Table 3). The largest number of respondents (58, 54%) reported that they received positive or negative feedback on their transition assessment process from other special special educators and parents of students with disabilities. Over half (57, 53%) reported that they received feedback from their special education administrators. Some students who are actually involved in transition assessment process gave feedback to 46 respondents (43%). General education administrators responsible for the supervision of transition coordinators were only reported to provide feedback on the transition assessment process by 12 respondents (11%). Five respondents added comments: "Community partners where assessment conducted." "The district is currently involved in the Indicator 13 successful Practices in Secondary Transition for Continuous Improvement." "The IEP team." and "Community organizations." Eighteen respondents (17%) reported that they did not receive any feedback on their transition assessment process.

Table 3 From whom did you receive feedback on your transition assessment process?

Answer	Response	%
Parents	58	54%
Special Educators	58	54%
Special Education Administrators	57	53%
Students	46	43%
PDE/BSE Staff	34	31%
General Educators (teachers/guidance counselors)	25	23%
No one, I do not get feedback	18	17%
General Education Administrators	12	11%
Other	5	5%

4.7   LEA IDENTIFICATION OF BARRIERS AND SUCCESSES

The respondents who were identified by the Pennsylvania Department of Education as their school district's (LEA) transition coordinator were asked to identify the factors that had supported their implementation of the transition assessment mandate.   Three (3) transition coordinator respondents were unable to identify any factors at all.   Support from the Intermediate Unit was reported by 85 respondents (79%). And 81 respondents (75%), reported that support from their district's Special Education Director.   Additional response rates are provided in Table 4.   Support was also received from professional development on transition assessment policy, procedures, and implementation (68 respondents, 63%), outside agencies such as OVR (61 respondents, 56%), PaTTAN (46 respondents, 43%), parents (42 respondents, 39%), general education administrators (30 respondents, 28%) and general education teachers and guidance counselors (25 respondents, 23%).   From the survey respondents, the majority reported that the factors that supported their implementation were support from their Intermediate Unit (IU), special education directors and professional development on the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate.   Support in the form of additional time in the school day to conduct transition assessment mandate had been provided to 18 respondents (17%) by their school district. Three respondents provided additional factors that supported implementation. One wrote, "The district hired a transition coordinator and transition assistant to effectively manage the school's program." Another indicated, "Being cited in the special education audit 6 years ago caused more effective transition practices within our school district."   And finally, the third comment was simply, "Outside Consultation." Interestingly, only 21 respondents (19%) reported that individual students self-advocated for additional transition assessments in order to use the information to plan for their futures.

The LEA transition coordinator respondents were asked to identify the factors that had inhibited implementation of age-appropriate transition assessment and transition planning based on transition assessment results (see Table 4). The majority, 80 respondents (74%), reported not enough time in the school day. One respondent added, "The state does not mandate a full-time transition coordinator; therefore, our school does not have someone available to do these activities." Another explained,

As one of the transition coordinators at our high school, I wear many hats which makes it difficult to efficiently implement transition practices. I teach two classes and have a caseload of 12 students. Much of my day is taken away from transition planning to complete IEP's, progress monitor students, write lesson plans, grade papers, etc.

Table 4 Factors that inhibited LEA's implementation of transition assessment mandate

Answer	Response	%
Not enough time in the school day	80	74%
Access to students fully included	45	42%
Parental Input	44	41%
Lack of financial resources	39	36%
Need for training	32	30%
Lack of support from general education administrators	29	27%
Lack of understanding from students	28	26%
Lack of agency support	28	26%
Lack of support from general education teachers	25	23%
Lack of support from parents	14	13%
Lack of support from special education director	12	11%
Results of transition assessment are inconsistent and not useful	10	9%
None	6	6%
Lack of support from PaTTAN	4	4%
Lack of support from the IU	2	2%

The second largest factor identified as inhibiting implementation of the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate was inability to access students who were fully included in the general education curriculum (45 responses, 42%). One respondent considered "the balance of academic coursework/state mandated assessments and time for transition planning" as an inhibiting factor. Another wrote, "Limited ability to access students fully included in the general education curriculum and priority given to high stakes testing." Another added, "Transition planning is not a priority, only high stakes testing. We need to inform superintendents and other administrators about the mandate as they can't seem to understand the importance or stress importance." There were only 6 respondents (6%) who stated that in their LEA they did not encounter any barriers with the implementation of the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate.

4.8   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING

The LEA transition coordinator respondents were asked to identify what additional information or training would help them administer transition assessments (Table 5). The majority (65 respondents, 60%) reported that they would like transition assessment guidance forms and examples. In addition, 57 (53%) requested both that transition assessment guidance forms be posted on a website for easy access and downloading and a web-based tool to support the implementation of the transition assessment mandate. Forty-seven respondents (44%) suggested that the state revise the IEP form to provide a clear model on where and how transition assessment information was to be documented in a student's IEP. A transition conference with sessions specifically related to transition assessment was requested by 41 respondents (38%).

Only 8 respondents (7%) reported that they needed an indicator 13 checklist (consistent with the report by 91 respondents (84%) that the state had already provided them with an indicator 13 checklist) (see Table 5).

Table 5 Information/training LEA identified as a need for implementing transition assessment

Answer	Response	%
Guidance forms and examples	65	60%
Guidance forms and examples posted to a website for access	57	53%
Web-based tool	57	53%
Revise IEP annotated form	47	44%
Transition conference	41	38%
Face-to-face professional development	36	33%
Understanding of transition assessment and my role	33	31%
Technical assistance on transition assessment documents	30	28%
Other	13	12%
Indicator 13 checklist	8	7%
None	4	4%

Thirteen (13) respondents (12%) added comments. Nine of the 13 related to time. For example,

> The importance and the time needed for staff to implement [needs to be] explained to administrators, transition coordinators need to be able to implement, interpret and analyze data with students and we can't do this if administrators place us in classrooms.

Additional responses included: "More time to complete transition activities." "I need time during the day to meet with students and plan with them. Having the time to administer more assessments to students...and having the time to review the information with the students." The final four comments did not focus on time. Instead they were requests for "more funding," "free

transition assessment for school districts that are research-based," "no webinars please," and "support from administration."

4.9   HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

The survey asked participants to describe three highly effective practices with regard to the age appropriate transition assessment provision in their school district (LEA).   Of the respondents. 103 (95%) wrote in answers to this question.   Five (5%) respondents reported that they could not identify any highly effective practices.   One explained,

> I don't think we really have anything that would be considered highly effective.   As stated before, we use the Brigance.   I am currently taking classes to get my certification as a transition coordinator.   Through these classes, it is my hope to gain a better understanding of what it is she should be doing.

Another commented,

> I don't think I would call these highly effective but I get to know all of the IEP students that move through our school during yearly meetings and during classes that I might be included with them. I monitored their grades.

The remaining responses fell into five themes (Table 6)

Table 6 Pennsylvania LEA's Transition Coordinators' Effective Transition Assessment Practices

Theme	Response	%
Assessment process	55	51%
Partnerships	29	27%
Staff development/training	21	19%

Table 6 (Continued)

Begin planning at an early age	7	6%
Transition/Career Development Class	5	5%

The majority of the responses, 55 (51%), appeared to indicate that simply having an assessment process was a highly effective practice. They discussed providing informal assessments, selecting the most appropriate assessments, developing a transition assessment planning guide by grade level, and administering community based assessments, surveys and community based vocational training.   One respondent reported as a best practice selecting the most appropriate assessment and interpreting the data within the context of assessed interests and the expressed interests. For others, best practices in transition assessment included "provide transition materials, create opportunities, provide resources."   Another reported, " We have a chart with formal and informal transition assessments to use based on the age /grade students. " One of the more detailed responses:

> We created a grade level transition assessment guide and our own assessment lab for
> production, assembly and packaging tasks similar to PAES, but at a more functional level
> that evaluates students on global vocational skills that apply to most jobs.   2) We do
> progressive situational vocational assessments - first within our in-school jobs, and then
> progress to our community partner sites, then to the student's home community or
> postsecondary goal site. 3) We have a certified in both cooperative education and special
> education teacher as a transition consultant, and a full-time trained and experienced job
> coach that work as a team to conduct in-school and community based assessments.

In contrast to this elaborate response, one of the respondents characterized a best practice as; "Transition interview held yearly: however, many do it monthly or quarterly."

A second theme within the responses to the question of highly effective practices was that of partnerships. Partnerships were discussed by 29 of the LEA transition coordinators (27%). The majority specified OVR within the partnership theme. Sample responses included:

Questionnaires are sent to the parents regarding transition and their students' needs after graduation. OVR comes to the school as well, and provides evaluations for those that they feel will qualify for their services, all juniors and seniors with an IEP and who are willing to meet with OVR do meet with the counselor.

And, "Student interviews, link with OVR and parent input." Or, "More involvement with outside agencies such as OVR, Center for Independent Living, Base Service Unit, CareerLink and using more age appropriate transition assessments." One respondent reported partnering with a university; "We take our junior and senior IEP students to a transition clinic at Bloomsburg University to again provide them with information that will be useful/helpful for post-secondary planning."

Another third theme emerging from the transition coordinators' responses was staff development/training (21 responses 19%). Transition coordinators described training on implementation of age appropriate transitions assessments as a highly effective practice. Others cited receiving resources, training and checklists from their intermediate units. One reported, "We have had extensive indicator 13 training with our IU transition consultant. Transition coordinators continue to receive training regarding transition and assessments." A second wrote, " Recently, we started including a middle school teacher in on the meetings and trainings provided by our local intermediate unit." One respondent added, " We did training last spring

where we introduced a list of recommended and optional assessments by grade. We have a shared folder of transition resources that all special education staff can access." And one reported that "professional development time for collaboration across grade levels, use of online assessments and administrative mandate" were best practices in transition assessment.

A smaller number of the responses were found among the final two themes. Seven (7) participants (6%) noted that beginning the transition assessment and transition planning process at an early age was a highly effective practice implemented within their LEA. One participant reported, " We begin transition planning at age 12, unless it is a "high profile" case, then we start earlier. Transition testing begins early on." Another believed that by "begin[ing] transition planning in 6th grade" was a highly effective practice. Another advised,

> It is important not to begin at the last moment to help the student plan their future. We start early so we can get an idea on how to steer them. We also use a snack shop (middle school) to assist our students in learning communication, math, social and vocational skills, as well as, job shadow opportunities and work experiences.

Five participants (5%) considered providing a transition/career development class to be a highly effective practice. One transition coordinator explained, "The transition class is the first step in providing transition related assessments and does not place the burden on the IEP case managers. Working with the transition coordinator allows the coordinator to identify strengths and needs."

The next survey question asked respondents to explain why they considered these practices to be highly effective. In the responses, 42 transition coordinators (39%), explained that their assessment process was a highly effective practice because it provided information about the students' strengths, interests, abilities, learning preferences and needs. As one

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transition coordinator put it, "The assessments that we use give us the ability to look at each student individually and really make a solid transition goal for each student that we work with." Another explained, " We have a system/plan in place and then we adjust based on the unique needs of each student."

Another set of answers to why a best practice was effective focused on ease of implementation. Thirteen (13) of the LEA transition coordinators (12%) considered grade level checklists as highly effective practices specifically because of their ease of implementation. "There is so much available in terms of transition assessment that is can be overwhelming. By having a plan by grade level, teachers know what to focus on," wrote one respondent. Seven (7) respondents (6%) reported that their assessment process was highly effective because it enabled them to create meaningful goals for their students. One transition coordinator stated, "They provide an individual road map for the students' plans after graduation." Another Seven (7) respondents (6%) explained that their assessments were highly effective because they individualized the transition plan. The theme of individualizing the assessment process is best illustrated through this quote from a transition coordinator:

> This is highly effective for our students because it is entirely individualized. Every student's transition action plan for the year is completely tailored to their individual needs based on assessment results from the variety of initial transition assessments. The transition services and activities will continue to build upon each year along a continuum.

Nine (9) respondents (8%) reported that professional development/training was highly effective because it provided materials to staff, "It provides the teachers with highly accessible resources for transition assessments and IEP meetings have become more thought provoking with the students' goals in mind."

In nine (9) responses, (8%) transition coordinators explained the importance of relationships with community partners as a highly effective practice to facilitate a student's transition to the adult world. One respondent simply stated, "It is so important to invite agencies to transition and IEP meetings." While another provided a more elaborate response:

We do a lot of job shadows and also work experience (mainly seniors) which is a real world approach to the next step for many students. We also facilitate post-secondary college visits and assist with OVR testing so that students are able to have academic accommodations at the college level."

There were other reasons given for why transition coordinators judged their transition assessment practices to be effective. Some thought it was because they promoted independence, gave parents resources, were paired with effective special education services, preparing students for the transition planning process, or provided students with community based work experiences. One transition coordinator responded to why her LEA's assessment policies and practices were highly effective by stating, "Assessment policies promote independence and focus on what's best for the student becoming a contributing member in society." Another stated, "It is difficult for me to answer these questions because I don't feel that our district values special education, the importance of transition, or they even know what the transition coordinator does." Another explained, " I have limited resources and rely on my fellow colleagues from neighboring districts to obtain resources and ideas for transition." Another wrote, "Most of these assessments are free to use and are designed to the students and their age levels." Only one respondent discussed support from staff and administration as an explanation of why their transition assessment process was highly effective. This transition coordinator explained,

I consider this to be effective because it is a requirement for all students, not just students with IEPs. There are times carved out of the day-built into 2-hour delay days, and scheduled to encourage student participating. It is strongly supported by all staff and administration.

4.10   FEEDBACK LEA RECIEVED ON THEIR TRANSITION ASSESSMENT PROCESS

All 108 respondents to the transition assessment survey wrote answers to the open ended survey question that asked participants what feedback they had received on their LEA's transition assessment process. Among the respondents, 29 (27%) reported feedback on the need to improve their transition assessment process, 28 transition coordinators (26%) reported positive feedback, 23 (21%) explained their feedback was related only to special education compliance issues, and 15 (14%) wrote that they did not receive any feedback on their transition assessment process. One transition coordinator stated:

"Sometimes I have heard from administrators that the transition assessment/PLOPS piece is very well done. Sometimes we hear from parents that it is not good enough. I do not write full IEPs, but the teachers that I work with do and these are the things I hear when I am in the meetings sometimes. Again, those that do take the time to do the assessments get the praise occasionally. Those who don't do the assessments who have parents unhappy with their child's education are quick to express their displeasure.

The respondents wrote longer responses to this open ended question than to the other three open ended questions. As a group, they seemed eager to discuss this issue. As one respondent wrote, " We really lack a formal transition assessment process. We have been

working on this for years and have made little progress. I attribute this to a variety of reasons which would be easier to explain over the phone." Another stated,

> Feeling it is a lot of work; not enough time to get it done; we are asking teachers in a school setting to do so much more and holding them accountable and not giving them any more time to get it done.

A more detailed response was,

> We were advised that the transition assessments need to be more age appropriate and not look so similar over the years of the student's career. But administrators don't want teachers spending too much time or the school district taking too much ownership away from families. Teachers don't have time to document ALL they do and are concerned about being held accountable if transition goal is not met."

Responses to this open-ended question were also coded by whom the transition coordinators identified as giving feedback.   The majority of respondents, 27 (25%) reported receiving feedback from other school district personnel. Fifteen (15) respondents (14%) reported receiving feedback from either PDE or their Intermediate Units. Students themselves provided feedback to 14 (13%) of respondents. Another 14 respondents, (13%) stated that parents of the students with disabilities provided feedback to them on their transition assessment process. Only 4 transition coordinators (4%) described receiving feedback from a community agency.

4.11   LEA IDENTIFIED TRANSITION ASSESSMENT ISSUES

The last open ended survey question stated; "There may be important issues that I missed during this survey.   Would you please describe these or any other comments?" (see Table 7) Of the

transition coordinator respondents, 31 (29%) noted that they did not have anything else to add to the survey. An example of this type of response; " I don't feel that you missed anything...this was a very thorough survey. Thank you for taking the time to research the topic for us and providing information!"

Table 7 Pennsylvania LEA's Transition Coordinators' identified Transition Assessment Issues

Theme	Response	%
None	31	29%
Need more time	29	27%
Access and Implementation	24	22%
Funding	16	15%
Lack of Administration Support	14	13%
Other	6	6%

An additional 29 participants (27%), wrote that they needed more time to implement transition assessment. One respondent explained:

I think you have addressed the key issue here in our district is - time. Special Education teachers wish there was more time in the day to provide instruction on transition issues. We feel the district focuses on the honors/AP students and doesn't realize how important it is to provide job shadowing and work opportunities for what I think of as our in-between kids. These are the students that anticipate graduating and getting a job right out of high school - however they need instruction in searching for a job, identifying a job, applying, interviewing, and then soft skills to keep a job. They need instruction in money management, time management, "life skills",etc. There is also more attention and instruction needed for students with mental health needs transitioning to college and/or getting and keeping a job (soft skills and social skills). I feel assessment is ongoing.

Another respondent stated;

> As a transition coordinator working with High School students and special
> education teachers daily, I feel there is such a lack of time to do things effectively.
> There are so many variables and demands for accommodations and modifications and co-
> teaching, teachers have a hard time meeting all of these demands.

One LEA respondent stated the problem of inadequate time could be solved by the district hiring
a transition coordinator;

> If the state believes that transition is as important as they say it is (and I support that),
> then they need to mandate districts have at least one person working full time in that
> position. I am wearing many hats and transition is a small percentage of what I am able
> to do. The state mandates that one person is "identified" as transition coordinator, but
> there are no direct rules about the other roles this person plays.

> Access to transition assessment tools and implementation of the transition assessments in
> transition planning was discussed by 24 of the respondents as a barrier for implementing
> transition assessment. One transition coordinator explained:

> One obstacle for me is accessing assessments. I am sure there are many good
> assessments but out there, but I am not always sure where to look. I can find a lot of
> things online, but then I wonder if they are good tools. I do not want to invest money in
> something unless I know it will meet my needs and be effective. I also have a hard time
> finding appropriately leveled assessments.

Another response highlights not just access but the implementation of the transition assessment
mandate; "Getting them the assessment tools is only half of it. The interpretation of the data and
what to do with it seems to be an even bigger issue. Prioritizing the data collected from the

assessments is also a challenge." The quote, below, is a more detailed response along the same lines.

In the past I felt our school district failed at utilizing the transition assessment results. I always thought what is the point of completing assessment results if they are not used to drive the student's transition services/activities for the school year. I feel it is essential for school districts to set up a specific routine and a way to disburse transition assessment information so the results can be used to determine individual needs. We even use them for determining what students go on what field trips or attend various types of career presentations. We also use it to determine what field trips and presentations to set up based on the needs of our students. I feel it is always helpful for school districts to be guided in how to properly use the results once they are collected or else it's not really serving a purpose. I feel students are not leaving high school equipped with the proper level of life skills they need to be successful. Our school continues to develop and restructure programs to help improve this area but I feel it is a common issue.

Another theme that emerged from these last open-ended responses concerned funding for the age appropriate transition assessment mandate. One LEA transition coordinator asked, "Where do you find free appropriate assessments?" Another reported, "Funding is the biggest barrier to implement transition assessments the way they were intended to be implemented. Decrease funding means all school staff need to do more with less and additional resources including contracted services are not an option." Another simply reported, "We do not have the staff, finances and the time to complete a variety of assessments."

Fourteen (14) participants (13%) reported that their LEA administration was a barrier to the transition assessment process. One LEA transition coordinator wrote, " A difficulty I have

come across is the aide from administrators, Director of Special Education, Supervisors that do not understand the importance and communication that is necessary for students' directions after high school." Another wrote, "Transition assessment is transition planning and the fact that this is a legal mandate and an important process is not always understood by all parties. Superintendent is concerned with state test scores and this is just as important." Several transition coordinators asked for training on the age appropriate transition assessment mandate to be targeted at their administration.

> I think another common issue we experienced in our school district is getting administration on board with understanding the importance of transition and how it needs to drive student's academic experience as well. We have come a long way in our school district. Transition is now valued within our school district. A lot of times it is due to administration being naive, not reluctant. I feel that more training should be available for administrators and how to play a part in transition within the school district.

Another respondent focused on principals' need for education on the transition assessment mandate:

> Although this is a mandate and transition coordinator needs to implement transition services, transition planning-transition is not driving secondary experiences. Principals need to understand importance of transition and that student outcomes and graduation rates are how the school districts' special education services are evaluated. As such they need to understand more than Keystone scores matter and there needs to be more time and personnel devoted to transition planning who individualize for all students in all of our schools."

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There were others who reported areas that could not be coded within any of the above themes. These included: focusing on procedures over substance, a need for more parental involvement, transportation barriers, a need for a transition curriculum, a transition coordinator not being part of the school decision making team, and a need for training on teaching self-advocacy skills to students.

4.12   VERIFICATION INTERVIEWS

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to provide contact information if they were willing to participate in a follow-up telephone interview. Of the respondents, 42 (39%) volunteered. A 10% sample of 5 (12%) volunteers were randomly selected and contacted. The telephone interview focused on verifying the trends that had emerged in the analysis of survey responses.   Two of the respondents were from the western region of Pennsylvania (one from a rural area and one from a suburban area), two were from the eastern region (both identified their school districts as located within a suburban area) and one was from the central region of Pennsylvania (identified their school district as from a rural area).

The survey revealed that 60% of Pennsylvania's LEA transition coordinators utilized a grade level transition assessment protocol.   Of the five interview respondents, 2 used a grade level assessment guide.   Transition Coordinator 2 explained; "We don't have a grade level protocol.   A few things are defined.   But we don't have a full system, grade-to-grade, specifically what we would use.   It is more designed based on the needs of the student."   Another stated, "So I think we look at what's appropriate for each student then at this grade, we do this kind a thing." Transition coordinator 4 explained:

And depending on the student and their placement and what classes they're in for regular

education, what classes they're in for special education, depends on what assessments

they take through the Choices program. So I would say that yes it is by grade level

because some students in 7th grade do different ones in their classes than the kids in 9th

grade may do, and then I use that information. Me, in particular, I do one survey that

covers all of 7 through 12. And assessment-wise, well, there's just not a lotta time to do a

lot of that individually, so."

These statements supported the survey finding that some of Pennsylvania's LEA's developed a

grade level transition assessment protocol. The five interviewees also confirmed the survey

finding that 100% of the transition coordinators responded utilized informal surveys. For

example, one reported, "I was always trying to find just different things to do with transition and

those inventories." Another explained her resources and referenced her most effective resources

as JIST products that are commercial informal surveys.

None of the five interviewees reported receiving policy or procedures from the state in

regards to the implementation of the age appropriate transition assessment mandate. They did

discuss training provided by the Intermediate Unit. All of the interviewees discussed age

appropriate transition assessment in terms of compliance with Indicator 13. Beyond

understanding what to place in IEPs, they were seeking additional training and support with the

implementation of the age appropriate transition assessment in their schools. Interviewee 4

explained:

So as far as understanding what needs to go in an IEP for the paperwork side of it, I guess

I understand. There's a whole lot of it, though, that is kinda like what do I do? Okay, so I

have all this information, what do I do with it? So I have this assessment, well what does

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that tell me? Where should I go with this kid? You know, I know that they say that the transition plan should drive the IEP and I hear it over and over and over again. I just don't know what that's supposed to look like. I don't know how we're supposed to start with a transition plan and work backwards, you know, being that I only put in a piece of that IEP for each student. I don't know. I just, there's, I guess I feel there's still a whole lot that maybe I don't understand, and I think that the expectations of someone who is to be the transition coordinator are very high."

The 5th interviewee expressed a need for more guidance from the state with implementation. When asked how her LEA selected transition assessments she responded;

Unfortunately, we're not given a lotta guidance, and the reason why I say that is because the Pennsylvania Department of Education has come in and has talked to us in particular at our district and talked about transition assessments that we have given in the past. And when I've asked them for a list of transition assessments, one of their statements one time to me was that some of our transition assessments were mediocre. Well, when I asked them what are the transition assessments that you have that you feel are exemplary, you know, because obviously they're the ones I wanna use or at least have And so I was like, "But you're trying to tell us that ours are mediocre, so how can you judge that as mediocre if you don't have examples of something that is exemplary?" And she's like, "Yeah, but no one really has a list of that." So I really don't know the answer to that. I know that when we go through, I look at transition assessments. I look at a wide variety of them because, for example, when you have a student who is considered multi-disabilities, there are very few transition assessments for students with multi-disabilities versus, you know, you have a student who's mainstreamed in regular ed but is a, you

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know, SLD student. There are a lot more transition assessments to choose from for that student.

The interview responses supported the survey results that the majority of respondents (60%) would like transition assessment guidance forms and examples.

The interviews also supported the survey finding that the majority of respondents partnered with OVR. All five of the interviewees reported partnering with OVR. But interviewee 1 characterized the partnering as, "we kind of almost look at them as competition versus collaboration. OVR is more of a funding stream." He did not report any other partnerships. Interviewee 2 explained that OVR and Goodwill were partners with Goodwill providing vocational evaluations and feedback to their LEA on transition assessment. Interviewee 3 explained CareerLink and OVR as partners, but she added that the relationship with OVR was changing. She explained that OVR was now interested in completing informal transition surveys with all of her junior and seniors. However, they had asked to administer her district developed survey. She stated during the interview,

> That's not gonna work. If OVR has all of this money and funds that they wanna use for school population, you're gonna have to come up with your own - if you wanna do this - you own program, so to speak.

When discussing CareerLink she explained they no longer provided services to their students, "it's sorta political - with some school districts- but we have." Interviewee 4 and 5 explained that they partnered with OVR but not on the age appropriate transition assessment mandate as they do not provide transition assessment services to the students within their LEAs.

They are not doing transition assessments within our school district. They are just doing

transition planning and then kind of supporting me and parents in making sure the student

has a plan in place for when they leave high school."

Interviewee 5 responded, "So the OVR is just meeting with us on occasion with students to talk

about the transition planning process." It was clear throughout the five interviews that the age

appropriate transition assessment mandate was the sole responsibility of the school districts. The

interviews also confirmed that increased inter-agency collaborations was still needed in order to

appropriately implement the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate

Other statements that emerged from the verification interviews supported the results of

the survey: One or more interviewees confirmed the need for time to complete transition

assessment, the need for the state to mandate full time transition coordinators within every LEA,

the difficulty accessing students within the general education curriculum, the primary use of one

on one for administration of transition assessments, and the general feeling that transition

coordinators do not feel prepared to implement the transition assessment mandate. All five

interviewees asked for additional training on the implementation of transition assessment.

Some additional comments from the interviewees were particularly noteworthy.

Interviewee 1 stressed the importance of utilizing "real work" to assess students. He reported, "

We have a strong component through 28 different work community-based training sites

where we truly assess live work versus the formal assessment piece. I mean one thing is

to do the job. The other thing is to know how to do it and how to seek information to do

the job correctly.

Interviewee 2 added,

My struggle a lotta times is the reality check, and how to make sure that a student's goal is within their capability without selling them short. Some tangible way to get a really clear picture of what they might be capable of is my kind of challenge.

She then continued to explain about concerns she had for the expectations the state had for all students. She had attended a luncheon hosted by a superintendent speaking on behalf of Pennsylvania's Secretary of Education and had listened to the audience cheer when he said that all students should have their career plans developed by 8th grade. She was very concerned.

To know what they want to do and have a plan to attain it, by eighth grade? Your brain's not even developed yet. ...But I think sometimes we push too hard to have a goal and a plan too early. And, with transition, I try not to do that. ...So I'm not sure where the state is pointing us with career development for regular ed and special ed students. Most eighth graders might not have the knowledge of the jobs available.

Interviewee 3 requested additional trainings similar to past trainings. "You had somebody energetic. It wasn't a webinar. It wasn't somebody that just read from a PowerPoint. It gave you useful information, or gave you something that you could take back and you could use it." She continued to explain that she wanted, "Some new information, something that you don't have that you've used for the past 12 years." In explaining her frustration with current Pennsylvania Indicator 13 trainings she explained, "it's just a paper-pushing of information."

The 4th interviewee reported her frustration with;

…my time and the lack of coordination or the ability to coordinate schedules in order to meet with students and even if I do the assessment or have a chance to do it, it doesn't mean I can do anything with it. I have the information but that's about it.

She understood that transition assessment was a mandate but couldn't understand how it could be conducted within the school day with all of her (and her students') other responsibilities. She explained how she met the state compliance and the paperwork regulations of implementing the transition assessment mandate, but stressed that she needed assistance with using transition assessment in training, planning, and understanding how to conduct within the school day. She stated, "If we truly did transition the way it is supposed to look, we would never be able to do it in the time that we're given. So I think there's a lot still missing."

The final interview respondent (#5), expressed concerns that we were assessing and training students to get jobs but not to maintain jobs. She was concerned that school districts were not providing students with the skills they truly needed and that transition assessment could help guide instruction. " I sometimes think that we lack the information about just teaching the kids the job maintenance skills and the soft skills and assessing where the kid's at." She also stressed the need for the state to recommend and provide the LEA with effective transition assessments and to produce more effective transition assessments for the low incidence populations. She reported that when she asked for this information she was given one informal healthcare checklist and didn't understand how using the same assessment every year with a student from age 14-21 would be considered age-appropriate transition assessment. She stated "We need to really work on what we can provide that's gonna give us some good data to work with to place these students, hopefully, out in the community, which is what the state wants us to do."

5.0   DISCUSSION

Federal policies regarding transition services have evolved over the past several decades. Furney, Hasazi, and DeStefano (1997) reflected that the initial IDEA mandates, in 1990, "broadened the scope of special education by adding a requirement that transition planning be incorporated into the individualized education program (IEP) planning process" (p. 343).   IDEA 1990 actually did insert the concept of transition planning into the IEP process, but the requirements were so broad that the language and concepts were found to be vague and confusing to the field (O'Leary, 2006). IDEIA 2004 corrected that by adding the requirement that age appropriate transition assessments be incorporated into the IEP process. Now the language regarding transition planning became far more practical, specifying the age appropriate transition assessment provision, among other more specific components.

Nonetheless, there were still questions about what was meant by age appropriate transition assessments.   For example, Morningstar and Liss (2008) investigated the provision across SEAs and reported the need for further research to examine in greater detail how LEAs were implementing the mandate.   The purpose of this research study was to follow up on this suggestion.   It explored how LEAs, all practicing within the same state, were responding to the age appropriate transition assessments provision in IDEIA 2004.   Those identified through the Pennsylvania Department of Education as responsible for coordinating transition services for their LEA were contacted to participate in this study.   One hundred and eight (108) LEA level

transition coordinators completed a survey and provided detailed responses and explanations to multiple choice and open-ended questions about how their LEA responded to the age appropriate transition assessment provision. The response rate of 31% indicated that transition assessment was a topic that the LEAs wanted to discuss. Additionally, five LEA transition coordinators were randomly selected from those responders to participate in follow-up interviews.

Through this survey, I hoped to identify best practices as well as barriers to the implementation of the age appropriate transition assessment, to make recommendations for additional technical assistance needed by LEA transition coordinators, and to suggest future research studies based on the information collected. These topics are discussed below.

5.1   SUMMARY OF RESULTS

There was an equal distribution of suburban and rural LEAS responding to the survey with an additional small percentage of urban district coordinators. The responses were reflective of the demographics of the state. Respondents were from locations throughout the state, with a slightly higher representative of western transition coordinators.

The initial list of contacts came from the Secondary Transition Directory published by the Pennsylvania Department of Education on its website. Yet, among the 108 respondents, only 42 individuals (39%) reported that their job title within their LEA was that of 'transition coordinator, and 69 (64%) spent 20% or less of their time devoted to transition. It is not surprising that a constant theme in the survey responses was the need for more time to conduct transition assessment and complete the requirements of the transition coordinator job.

5.2   IMPLEMENTING POLICY

The majority of the survey respondents reported that they discussed the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate with colleagues in their school, received training from the Intermediate Unit and discussed transition assessment with outside agencies but they still felt they needed additional resources and training on implementation. More than half of the respondents (60%) reported that they would like to receive transition assessment guidance forms and examples. It would appear that 12 years after the inclusion of the age appropriate transition assessment mandate, LEAs are still struggling with implementation and there is not a unified approach to defining or implementing age appropriate transition assessment among the LEAS within this same state. The findings of this research study are consistent with the findings of DeStefano and colleagues (1997), who, nearly 20 years ago, had evaluated the transition systems change initiative and warned that it is an error to believe that policy implementation is "a homogenous and unified process" (p. 124).   They reminded readers that educational governance in the United States is highly influenced both by local control and by a large amount of variability across and within states.   Ten years later, Neubert (2006), reported that LEAs still displayed a great deal of variability in how they have "complied with the transition mandates" (p. 41). The current data show that little has changed.

This study found that only 19% of the LEAs had adopted a formal definition of transition assessment although 43% of the LEAs had adopted an informal definition of transition assessment.   Two years after the reauthorization of IDEA 2004, very few states had developed policies or guidance documents for interpreting and implementing transition assessments (Morningstar & Liss, 2008). The results of this study suggest that eight years later the LEAs still need their state to develop guidance documents for interpreting and implementing transition

assessments. It would appear that the implementation of educational policies is still complex and challenging, often hindering the ability of the LEA to meet the requirements of the policy (Furney, et al., 1997; Hasazi et al., 1999).

5.3 NATURE OF TRANSITION ASSESSMENT

The field had long supported a position in which transition assessment is student and family focused and an on-going process (Halpern, 1994; Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, & Leconte, 2007; Sitlington, Neubert, & Leconte, 1997). This position is consistent with the theoretical orientation of vocational assessment and evaluation. But some have suggested that the transition assessment mandate requires a psychoeducational orientation (i.e., a professional-centered approach for the purpose of determining eligibility or service delivery methods). In a research study conducted by Morningstar and Liss (2008), 32 states responded to the question, "Does your SEA interpret the new requirements for age appropriate transition assessments in the same manner as an evaluation or tri-annual reevaluation?" Thirty-one percent responded, "Yes," suggesting that one third of SEAs were interpreting the assessment provision with a psychoeducational orientation. Among the LEAs who responded in this study, eight years later, only 13% reported administering psychometric testing. It would appear that the LEAs who participated in this survey have adopted the vocational approach which actively involves the student in both informal and formal assessments and encourages both student reflection and IEP member reflection and interpretation. The results reflect a change from a reliance on formal assessments to an increasing reliance on a variety of more informal assessment results. In fact, 100% of respondents in this study reported using informal transition surveys. Only 53%

reported that they utilized commercial tools, formal vocational evaluations, formal assessments, and work samples. While this would seem to be a step in the right direction, research indicates that students need to be assessed using a variety of assessment techniques from multiple sources including community based assessments, background information, formal assessments, informal assessments and vocational evaluation. (Sitlington et al., 1997; Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, & Leconte, 2007; Carter, E., Brock, M., Trainor, A. ,2014) It is unclear how many LEAs in Pennsylvania utilize multiple assessment sources.

5.4   PAPERWORK AND COMPLIANCE

The LEAs in Pennsylvania appeared to focus on paperwork and compliance with Indicator 13, rather than assessing students' strengths, needs, interests, and preferences as they relate to future living, learning, and working environments. Clark (2007) found a similar result: school districts were responding to the transition mandates by adding the requirements to existing IEP forms and focusing on compliance rather than gathering information on students. Eighty-eight (88) respondents (81%) to the current survey reported that their LEA had developed and used an Indicator 13 checklist to guide the development of their students' IEPs. The LEAs of Pennsylvania in this study appeared to be focused primarily on complying with the paperwork requirements of the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate. This is consistent with past research on how the IDEA 1990 mandates were implemented in LEAs in Ohio in 1993. Baer, et al., (1996) found that compliance with the IDEA mandates was highest in area of procedures as "nearly 90% of the respondents reported the existence of a transition plan . . . but less than 50% reported transition services were being made available as required" (p. 69). In sum, the

researchers concluded that LEAs "were simply complying with the paperwork requirements of IDEA" (p. 69).

Surprisingly, however, a majority of transition coordinators, 56%, reported documenting all of their transition assessment practices in their students' IEPs. Given that a recurring theme across the LEAS of Pennsylvania was that transition coordinators did not have enough time for transition assessment, one would have thought this number would be lower, that they simply followed their Indicator 13 checklist and documented only one transition assessment annually but completed more assessments not recorded on the IEP. Without more detailed information it is impossible to determine whether what was recorded in the IEP was indeed all the transition assessment data they had collected (and it wasn't very much), or that they were not aware of all of the transition assessment information they possessed including behavioral observations and background information that they simply did not document. It is my belief that more transition assessment practices were occurring at the LEA level than transition coordinators had the time to document in IEPs and rather than focusing on paperwork, LEAs were focused on providing services to students with disabilities. More research is needed to explain this phenomenon.

5.5   NEED FOR TRAINING

Although 42% of the transition coordinators reported that the SEA provided their LEA with transition assessment guidance forms and examples, and 63% respondents reported that they received professional development on transition assessment policy, procedures, and implementation that supported their implementation of the mandate in their LEA, they still needed assistance with implementing within their local school district. Many reported needing

more support from their administrators both general education and special education supervisors with implementing the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate. The results in this study of Pennsylvania appear to be consistent with the nation-wide study by Williams and O'Leary (2001) in which many of the SEAs did not meet the IDEA 1990 transition requirements despite receiving policy guidance, technical assistance, and funding from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Williams and O'Leary found a disconnect between the federal policy and the actual practices in the field at the state level (i.e., a disconnect between the policymakers and those in the field doing the work, transition coordinators). It would appear that the implementation of the transition services provisions contained in IDEA has proven to be challenging for all three levels of government, federal, state, and local. It has proven specifically challenging for government executive agencies responsible for supporting and enforcing compliance such as state education agencies. Miscommunication between agencies is one of many factors that Williams & O'Leary suggest may have caused the difficulties that SEAs and LEAs have in implementing effective transition assessments.

One further indication of this disconnect between the SEA in this study and the LEAs was the request from transition coordinators for more face-to-face training and for a state-sponsored transition conference with sessions on transition assessment. Only 36 respondents (33%) reported that the SEA held a transition conference with sessions on transition assessment, yet the Pennsylvania SEA has held an annual transition conference for over 15 years with many sessions focused on this topic. During the follow-up interviews, the two respondents aware of the transition conference indicated that the sessions they attended were repetitive and did not provide resources or examples that could be implemented at their local school districts. Perhaps, more LEAs would be aware of Pennsylvania's state wide transition conference if it was not held

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in the month of July, in the middle of school districts' summer breaks. The LEAs in this survey were seeking additional training during their contracted school year.

5.6   INTERANGECY COLLABORATION

The results of this survey indicated a need for improved interagency collaboration with the implementation of the age appropriate transition assessment mandate. OVR was reported by 56% of respondents as the outside agency that most supported their LEA's implementation. Sitlington and Clark (2006) pointed out that from 1960 to 1975 the state vocational rehabilitation agencies, working jointly with SEAs, were remarkably successful in helping youth with disabilities, through work-study programs, to find employment after they had exited from high school. These programs provided career options and opportunity for people with disabilities. This was a time of great optimism as SEAs and state vocational rehabilitation agencies were engaged in a highly successful collaborative effort that led school personnel to believe "that it was a permanent policy commitment" (p. 15). It is disappointing that 30 years later, a large number of Pennsylvania LEA's in this study do not have the involvement of their state vocational rehabilitation agency (OVR) in the implementation of their transition assessment mandate. Interviewee 5 reported, "So the OVR is just meeting with us on occasion with students to talk about the transition planning process." It was clear throughout the five follow-up interviews that the age appropriate transition assessment mandate was believed to be the sole responsibility of the school districts.

5.7   STUDENTS AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

The results of the survey were promising in that they indicated that the LEAs in Pennsylvania were partnering with students and their family members. The majority of LEAs appeared to have incorporated a self-determined approach to assessment that could help transition teams gather information about a student's needs, strengths, interests and preferences so that transition goals could be established.   As long ago as 1994, Halpern described incorporating the student as a critical member of the transition assessment process.   He argued that students must be taught how to be an active participant who can perform self-assessments and who can interpret the meaning of these assessments as well as those that have been administered by others. Sitlington and colleagues (2007) have said that, "The most important person in the transition assessment process is the student" (p. 66).   Transition assessments need to actively engage the student beginning with selection of the procedures and ending with interpretation of the results as they relate to that student's individual goal setting and transition planning.   The LEA's in this survey appeared to be implementing this kind of a student-focused perspective although there were some possibly contradictory findings.   When the LEAs were asked about the feedback they received on their transition assessment process only 13% reported that they received feedback from the students and parents themselves.   Also only 19% reported that students were self-advocating for transition assessment. One LEA reported, "I feel that I could use more training of how to assess and teach self-advocacy skills in a one-on-one manner."

5.8   TIME

A majority of respondents, 74%, reported that they did not have enough time in the school day to administer transition assessments. The LEA's in the study asked for guidance on how to find the time and especially, how to access students fully included in the general education setting. The data from this survey indicated that 80% of the LEAs' students spent 50% or more of their time fully included in the general education curriculum yet only 29% reported that they conducted transition assessments within the general education curriculum. This was a concern. One respondent commented, " I'd like to learn about a feasible way to address this area." It would appear that there needs to be a shared understanding of the age appropriate transition assessment and its implementation by both special and general educators. More information is needed on the impact that including students with disabilities in general education has on their ability to participate in the mandated age appropriate transition assessment. If students are only able to complete informal transition surveys that are handed to them and returned to their transition coordinator, then perhaps full inclusion does not support the implementation of on-going age appropriate assessment and the development of students' transition plans.

The theme of needing more time was reported consistently throughout both the survey questions and the follow up interviews. Yet, of the respondents only 19% reported that transition was their full time responsibility. One LEA stated, "Time is a huge – I mean, there's a lot of mandates and things that we're supposed to do, but I'm not really sure when that's supposed to happen." Another reported, "If we truly did transition the way it is supposed to look, we would never be able to do it in the time that we're given. So I think there's a lot still missing." Indeed, in the area of transition, studies have shown that it has been difficult to implement almost all of

the transition services requirements required by federal law (Grigal et. al., 1997; Hasazi et al., 1999; Williams & O'Leary, 2001).

5.9   LEA IDENTIFICATION OF BARRIERS AND SUCCESSES

The majority of survey respondents reported that the factors that supported their implementation were 1) support from their Intermediate Unit (IU), 2) support from their special education directors and 3) professional development on the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate. Only 19% of respondents reported that individual students, self-advocating for additional transition assessments in order to use the information to plan for their futures was a factor that contributed to success. Of those surveyed, 17% reported that their successes could be attributed to the additional time in the school day to conduct transition assessment mandate that had been provided to them by their school district. One respondent stated, "The district hired a transition coordinator and transition assistant to effectively manage the school's program." Another 28% identified support from general educators as a factor that contributed to their successful implementation of the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate. Clearly successful implementation of the transition assessment mandate by LEAs requires support, training, time, student self-determination, and involvement in the transition assessment process and support from special educators, general educators and outside agencies.

Among the factors that had inhibited implementation of age-appropriate transition assessment and transition planning based on transition assessment results "not enough time in the school day" was the most consistently reported. One respondent provided, "The state does not

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mandate a full-time transition coordinator; therefore, our school does not have someone available to do these activities." Similarly, another responded, "

> As one of the transition coordinators at our high school, I wear many hats which makes it difficult to efficiently implement transition practices. I teach two classes and have a caseload of 12 students. Much of my day is taken away from transition planning to complete IEP's, progress monitor students, write lesson plans, grade papers, etc.

The second largest factor identified that inhibited the respondents' implementation of the age-appropriate transition assessment mandate was inability to access students fully included in the general education curriculum. Transition coordinators indicated that both time to complete transition assessment and access to students in the general education curriculum was needed. It is my hope that the results of this survey could be used to demonstrate the need for full time transition coordinators in every LEA, as well as collaboration among general education and special education to ensure that all students participate in ongoing age appropriate transition assessment in order to develop meaningful post school learning, working, and living goals.

5.10   IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The research on policy implementation indicates that it is a complex process facing numerous challenges (Furney et al, 1997; Hasazi et al., 1999). This study found a similar result. However, it also found that LEAs have identified what additional resources they need to implement the federal policy regarding age appropriate transition assessments. They are asking for a consistent definition of transition assessment, a policy requirement that every school district have a full-time transition coordinator, support of special and general education administrators,

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identification of evidence based best practices in transition assessment, student and family involvement, shared responsibility for transition assessment with vocational rehabilitation, and an increase in interagency collaboration for transition assessment.

Neither IDEA 2004 nor the subsequent regulations provided specific procedures for implementing the transition assessment process. Consequently, before providing support to LEAs, the SEA needs to interpret the age appropriate transition assessments provision. Morningstar and Liss (2008) indicated that some SEAs were interpreting the provision as an evaluation or three-year reevaluation. Others, however, were looking at it as a more comprehensive and on-going process. It is unclear if the SEA in this study provided an official definition of age appropriate transition assessment to the respondents. Only 20% of the respondents indicated that they had been provided with an official definition from the SEA. LEAs in the study are now asking for the development and delivery of guidance documents and technical assistance to improve the implementation of the transition assessment mandate. Many of the LEA participants in this study were using only one specific type of transition assessment, informal assessment, to comply with the mandate. The problem with this approach is that it continues the "narrow range of assessment areas used in schools since 1978" (Clark & Sitlington, 2007 p. 134). Thus, one important policy implication of the current research is that the SEA needs to provide a clear definition of federal transition assessments policy as it has the power to have a profound influence on the practices of the LEAs. Pennsylvania (the SEA) needs to not only encourage, but demand, that LEAs use a variety of assessment methods. The results of this study indicate that the SEA needs to provide LEAs with transition assessment guidance forms and examples, with face-to-face professional development on transition assessment, and post transition assessment guidance forms on the SEA website for LEAs to download and access.

Only 17% of Pennsylvania's LEAs responding to this survey reported that the SEA had developed web-based tools to support them with the implementation of the transition assessment mandate. Even fewer, 7%, reported that the SEA provided their school district with grants or funding for transition assessment. Increased resources are needed to provide LEAs the funding and evidenced based practices they need.

The transition coordinators were very clear in the survey what they would like to see in terms of training. They asked for examples and clear models of how to implement age-appropriate transition assessment and subsequent transition planning. They understood compliance and had Indicator 13 checklists but they needed information on what assessment tools and processes are linked to successful post secondary outcomes. It is evident that the LEAs in this study have been provided with training on paperwork compliance, but they asked for training on the implementation of a variety of transition assessment methods instead.

There is a need for increased interagency involvement in the transition assessment process. A true shared responsibility for transition assessment that incudes: funding, implementation, and interpretation among agencies including vocational rehabilitation (OVR). Agencies need to move beyond attending IEP meetings and providing basic transition planning guidance to sharing the responsibility for implementing age appropriate transition assessment and using the results to ensure students reach their post secondary education, employment, and independent living goals.

The results of this study demonstrate that LEAs need additional exposure and training with transition assessment strategies that work to promote student involvement in the process. LEAs need to increase active involvement by students and families in the assessment process. We need students and their families to go beyond participating in preparing the IEP and become

incorporated in the ongoing transition assessment used throughout the students' educational program. More work is needed to ensure that teachers have access to and know how to use transition assessment strategies that have been demonstrated to support student self-determination (i.e., person centered planning and self-determination curriculum-based instruments).

Evidently, a policy that requires LEAs to dedicate staff responsible for transition assessment, coordination, and planning is needed. It is not only necessary to provide more time for transition assessment but the work of the transition coordinator needs to be supported by both special educators and general educators. General education administrators need to receive training on the age appropriate transition assessment mandate in order to support its implementation within their LEAs. As more students with disabilities are fully included in the general education curriculum the need remains to examine the effect inclusion has on the implementation of the age appropriate transition assessment mandate, transition planning, and students' ability to attain post secondary education, employment, and independent living goals.

Only 15% of the LEA respondents reported that they had used information from a national organization or federal technical assistance agency such as DCDT, NTACT or NSTTAC to define transition assessment. The need remains for national transition assessment resource centers and organizations to examine the dissemination and usefulness of their transition assessment materials to LEA practitioners.

5.11   IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While research has been conducted on the implementation of the transition assessment policy, there remains a dearth of information on the implementation of transition assessment (Carter, Brock, & Trainor, 2014). Additional research needs to be conducted on the identification of effective transition assessments beyond informal transition surveys.   One LEA asked for research on the identification of specific transition assessments tools and strategies for the low incidence population of students with the most significant disabilities. LEAs are required to collect post school outcome data on students and analyze the data to determine the effectiveness of transition planning/services (O'Leary, 2006). Future research needs to be conducted on the relationship between the LEAs transition assessment practices and student's post school outcomes.

The LEAs in this study asked for additional training that provided them with evidence-based effective transition assessment practices that could be implemented at their school district. Future research is needed to examine how SEAs develop the materials and methods used specifically for transition assessment professional development. That is, it would be beneficial to examine whether the SEAs are using any research-based practices during this process, whether they are aware of research-based practices that lead to effective professional development, and whether current practices are effective – or ineffective.   This, in part, would not only respond to the LEAs requests for additional professional development, but also address the issue of why the implementation of federal policies is such a complex and lengthy process.

New research is needed that examines how policy implementation of the transition assessments mandate is progressing at SEAs across the nation (Carter, Brock, & Trainor, 2014). Morningstar and Liss (2008) examined how SEAs were defining and implementing the transition assessment mandate.   Mow, eight years later, additional research is needed to examine how the

SEAs vary in their definitions of the age appropriate transition assessment mandate, and how the SEA definition is translated into the practices of the LEAs within their jurisdiction.

The results of this study suggest that information is needed about why a variety of transition assessment strategies are not utilized in the transition planning process. We assume it is because the LEA does not know about different transition assessment resources and procedures, does not know how to administer, does not know how to choose between the various assessment tools, does not have the funding, or does not have the time. However, these are questions that still need to be answered with data.

Research studies need to be conducted on the effects of inclusion in the general education curriculum on the implementation of the IDEIA mandates including the age appropriate transition assessment provision. One LEA respondent indicated a need for research on students' development of self-determination skills when fully included within the general education curriculum or receiving direct instruction in self-advocacy in the special education classroom. Halpern (1994) stated that the student was a critical member of the transition assessment process. He argued that the student must be taught how to be an active participant who can perform self-assessments and who can interpret the meaning of these assessments as well as those that have been administered by others. It would be difficult to provide this instruction if the transition coordinators do not have access to the students during the school day. Another future research study could examine students' identification of transition assessment best practices. As the students, themselves, may have important things to say about the development and implementation of transition assessment policies and practices.

5.12   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the obvious limitations of this study was that the researcher surveyed transition coordinators from LEAs within a single state. LEAs from the same state were selected in order to examine any variability with implementation among LEAs when provided with the same guidance from their SEA. A different sampling plan may have revealed an even larger variability among responses. It is difficult to generalize the information reported by the Pennsylvania transition coordinators to other LEAs in other parts of the country.

Another limitation is that we do not know if the respondents listed in the Pennsylvania Secondary Transition Directory were in fact the LEA's transition coordinator. Although the letter to participants asked them to forward the survey to their LEAs transition coordinator, the respondents may not have forwarded or may not have been their LEA's transition coordinator. Additionally, this was self-reported data, which leads to questions about the validity of the data. It is possible that respondents provided socially acceptable answers. Ideally, such survey data should be triangulated not just with follow-up interviews but with observations, a review of student files, a review of LEA written policies, and additional interviews with multiple transition team members including family members and students themselves.

Additionally, the researcher interviewed only LEA transition coordinators. She may have received responses that were quite different had different transition team members been surveyed and interviewed. There may had been different responses to the LEA transition assessment survey questions if completed by students, parents, special education administrators, general education teachers, guidance counselors, principals or personnel from the SEA. It emerged from the study that the participants felt that their SEA had not provided a formal transition assessment definition, meaningful training, guidance, access to forms, or evidence-based practices for the

implementation of the age appropriate transition assessment mandate. Data collected from the SEA, itself, might have provided a very different perspective.

5.13   CONCLUSION

Clearly, this study identified what LEAs believed they needed in order to effectively implement the age appropriate transition assessment mandate: more time, access to evidence-based effective transition assessments, access to students in the general education curriculum, increased collaboration among special educators and general educators, knowledge and ability to implement a transition assessment process, involvement of families and students themselves, additional funding, increased interagency collaboration, and both special education and general education administration support. Not enough time was consistently reported throughout the survey.   Additional time was listed as a factor contributing to the success of the LEAs implementation of the age appropriate transition assessment mandate, and lack of time as the greatest barrier. The theme of needing more time to implement and coordinate transition assessment was discussed by respondents again in their open ended responses and was the largest theme in the follow-up interviews.   One LEA said it best. "If the state believes that transition is as important as they say it is (and I support that), then they need to mandate districts have at least one person working full time in that position. "

Implementation of the transition assessment mandate requires time and quality training not just on compliance with Indicator 13 but on the selection of assessments and the interpretation of the assessments. This study indicates that the Intermediate Units in the state were providing training but the SEA does not appear to have defined transition assessment,

identified best practices, or provided evidence-based examples that transition coordinators in the field can identify and access. The SEA needs to provide higher quality and more targeted professional development.

LEA's asked for more time to implement transition assessment, a policy that mandates a full time transition coordinator, resources from the state targeting implementing the transition assessment mandate instead of compliance, increased interagency partnerships with a true shared responsibility for implementing transition assessment. People do not know what assessments to use. Right now everyone is using informal assessments. This research study revealed that the development of student self-advocacy and family involvement in the transition assessment process needs to become a priority at the local level. Additionally, a need for LEA transition coordinators to utilize a variety of transition assessment tools and procedures beyond informal transition surveys was identified. The need remains to examine transition assessment as it relates to improved post school outcomes and to move beyond compliance to improving post school outcomes of youth with disabilities.

APPENDIX A

AGE APPROPRIATE TRANSITION ASSESSMENT STUDY INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS

1. You are listed as your school district's transition coordinator; would you please identify your position with your LEA?

    Special Education Teacher

    Transition Coordinator

    Special Education Director

    School Psychologist

    Other Please Explain

2. How long have you been the transition coordinator at your district?

    1 year or less

    < 5 years –

    <10 years

    < 15

<20 years

>20 years

3. How many transition coordinators are in your school district?

1

1.5

2

2.5

3

> 3

None

4. Approximately what percentage of your time is devoted to transition?

100% all day full responsibility

75%

50 %

20%

<20%

5. Which region of Pennsylvania is your school district located?

Eastern

Western

Central

Unsure

6. Please check the category that best describes your school district?

Rural (A settled area outside of a town or city - population under 10,000)

Urban (A metropolitan area or city - population over 1,000,000)

Suburban (A residential area on the outskirts of a city - population fro 10,000 to

over 1,000,000)

7. What is the total student population of your high school?

$0 < 1,000$

$1,001 < 2,000$

$2,001 < 3,000$

$3,001 < 4,000$

$4,001 < 5,000$

8. How many high schools are in your school district?

1

2

3

4

>4

9. What is the number of students with disabilities who attend your high school?

97

<10

10 - 50

50 - 100

100 - 150

150 - 200

200 - 250

\> 250

10. How many of your students with disabilities are fully included in the general education
curriculum?

None

All

All except for students who take the PASA (<1% of total student population)

75%

50%

25%

< 25%

11. Please check the approaches listed below that you and your local school district has taken
to better understand the transition assessment provision of IDEA? Please check all that
apply.

- Discussed the age appropriate transition assessments provision with colleagues in
your school district

 - Involved outside agencies in the discussion of transition assessment

- Communicated with other school districts on the transition assessment provision

98

- Communicated with personnel from the state on the transition assessment provision

- Adopted an informal definition for age appropriate transition assessments that has been shared with staff

- Adopted a formal definition for age appropriate transition assessments that is shared with staff and posted in the school district's special education handbook or website

- Developed a procedure for the identification of transition assessments

- Used information from a national organization or federal agency such as DCDT, NSTTAC or NTACT to define transition assessment

- Hired consultants to work with your school district on developing transition assessment practices

- Received training from PATTAN on the transition assessment provision

- Received training from Intermediate Unit on the transition assessments provision

- Other please write in answer

- No Action taken

12. How has your school responded to the transition assessment requirements? Please check all that apply

   - Developed a transition assessment protocol for students by grade level

   - Conducted transition assessments within the special education classroom

   - Conducted transition assessment with all students (not just special education) within the general education classroom

   - Provided more personnel to complete transition assessment

- Partnered with outside agencies to complete transition assessment

- Sent you to transition assessment conferences and/or professional development opportunities related to transition assessment

- Developed and use indictor 13 checklists for the development of student's IEPS in your school district

- Purchased additional formal transition assessment instruments

- Provided more time in school day for transition planning

- Other please write in answer

- No Action taken

13. What policies or guidance documents have you received from BSE/PDE to assist you and your school with implementation? Please check all that apply

-Provided face-to-face professional development on transition assessment

- Provided you with an official definition for age appropriate transition assessments

- Provided transition assessment guidance forms and examples

- Posted transition assessment guidance forms on PaTTAN/PDE website for you to download and access

- Held transition conference with sessions on transition assessment

- Developed web-based tool to support you with implementing the transition assessment mandate

- Revised state IEP form so a clear model is provided to you on where and how transition assessment information is to be documented in a student's IEP

-Provided you with an indicator 13 checklist

-Provided your school district with grants or funding for transition assessment

- Hired consultants to work with your school district on transition assessment

- Other please write in answer

- No Action taken

14. Has the transition assessment policy implementation changed the transition planning process since the mandate first appeared in IDEA in 2004?

 - Yes it has changed the transition planning process

- No the mandate has had no impact in our transition planning process

-I am unable to answer

15. What factors have supported the implementation of the transition assessments mandate in your district?   Please check all that apply

- Understanding and Support from General Education Administrators

- Support from General Education Teachers

- Support from Special Education Director

- Support from Pattan

- Support from the Intermediate Unit

- Support from outside agencies (OVR, OID, etc.)

- Professional Development on transition assessment policy, procedures and implementation

- Parental Support

 - Individual student's self-advocating for additional transition assessment in order to use the information to plan for their futures

- Time in school day provided now that it is a legal mandate

- Other please write in answer

- None

16. What factors have inhibited implementation of transition assessment and transition planning based on transition assessment results? Please check all that apply

- A lack of understanding/Support of the transition assessment mandate from General education Administrators

- Lack of understanding/support of the transition assessment mandate from General Education Teachers

- Lack of understanding/support of the transition assessment mandate from Special Education Director

- Lack of understanding/support of the transition assessment mandate from from PaTTAN Consultants and trainers

- Lack of understanding/support of the transition assessment mandate from the Intermediate Unit

- Lack of understanding/support of the transition assessment mandate from parents

- Lack of understanding/support of the transition assessment mandate from students, themselves

- Difficulty securing outside agency involvement with implementing the transition assessment mandate

- Not enough time in the school day

- Difficulty obtaining information from parents for transition assessment

- Lack of transition assessment tools

- Lack of financial resources for transition assessment mandate

- Inability to access students fully included in the general education curriculum

- Need for further training on implementation of the transition assessment mandate

- The results of transition assessments are inconsistent and can not be used for transition planning

- Other please write in answer

- No Action taken

17. Describe three highly effective policies or practices with regard to the age appropriate transition assessments provision in your school district. Why do you consider these policies or practices highly effective for you and your students?

18. What transition assessment tools and procedures do you utilize? Please check all that apply

- Informal surveys

 -Commercial tools

- Community based assessment

- Formal vocational evaluations

- Situational assessments

- Formal assessments

- Psychometric Testing

- Work Samples

- Work Tasks

- Interview

- Background Information

- Observations

- Vocational Training Analysis

- Assistive Technology Evaluation

- Other please write in answer

19. With whom do you collaborate to ensure that your transition assessment is age

appropriate and on going?   Please check all that apply

-Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)

- Office of Intellectual Disabilities (OID Independent Supports Coordinators)

- Office of Behavioral Health

- Students with disabilities

- Family members of students with disabilities

- Other school districts

-Other service providers

- Other Transition Coordinators

 - Special Educators within your school district

- Intermediate consultants

- PaTTAN consultants

- Other please write in answer

- None

20. How do you administer age-appropriate transition assessments during the school day?

   Please check all that apply

   - Administered to groups of students

   - Administered to each student, one on one

   - Administered to all students within the general education class room

   - Administered to a group of students within the special education classroom

   - Other please write in answer

21. From whom do you receive any positive or negative feedback on your transition

   assessment process?

   - Students

   - Parents

   - General Educators (teachers/guidance counselors)

   - Special Educators

   - PDE/BSE staff

- Special Education Administrator

- General Education Administrators

- Other please write in

- I don't get back

22. If someone reviewed your students' IEPs would they know all of the transition assessments activities, you implement with your students?

- All

- Some

- One a year

- None

23. What additional information/training would help you administer transition assessment? Please check all that apply

-Help understanding transition assessment mandate and my role in it

- Technical assistance on transition assessment documents

- Transition assessment guidance forms and examples

- Posted transition assessment guidance forms on website that can be accessed and downloaded

- Transition conference with sessions on transition assessment

- Web-based tool to support implementing the transition assessment mandate

- Revise state IEP form so a clear model is provided to you on where and how

transition assessment information is to be documented in a student's IEP

- Provide you with an indicator 13 checklist

- Hired consultants to work with your school district

- Provide face-to-face professional development on transition assessment

- Other please write in answer

- None

24. There may be important issues that I missed during this survey. Would you please describe these or any other comments?

25. Are there issues related to transition assessment not covered in this survey? Would you be willing to discuss in a telephone interview?

Name

Phone Number

Email address

Best time to call

APPENDIX B

LETTER SENT TO LEA TRANSITION COORDINATORS

February 1, 2016

Dear Transition Coordinator,

As you are aware, the federal government has continued to issue transition mandates in order to help youth with disabilities achieve better post secondary outcomes. One of the recent mandates, added in IDEA 2004,requires that age appropriate transition assessments be used in the transition planning process for students with disabilities.

To help identify the successes and difficulties that we, transition coordinators, face when attempting to define and implement *age appropriate transition assessment* within Pennsylvania schools, I am conducting a research study through the University of Pittsburgh. Please take the time to complete my survey and please be assured that all of your survey responses will remain completely ANONYMOUS. To access the survey, please click the link below or copy and paste the link into your web browser.

Your participation is very important. Through this survey, I hope to identify best practices as well as barriers to implementing age appropriate transition assessment, to make recommendations for additional technical assistance needed by transition coordinators across the state, and to suggest future research studies based on the information collected from you.

Once you complete the survey, you will be directed to a second website to submit information that will allow me to send you a $25 credit card in the mail as payment for your survey response. You must submit all of the information requested on the website in order to receive the credit card.

If you have any questions about completing the survey or about the payment process, please email me, Stacie, at SLD84@pitt.edu.   Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey!

https://pitt.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3K1uW9WJJX6FLhj

Sincerely,

Stacie L. Dojonovic Schutzman

Doctoral Candidate/ University of Pittsburgh

Transition Coordinator/ Fox Chapel Area School District

412 874-3111

SLD84@pitt.edu.

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. I don't have your survey responses in front of me because the responses were really anonymous so could you please remind me how is your school implementing transition assessment? Is it by grade level?

 2. Does your LEA have a set of written policies or procedures related to age appropriate transition assessment? Are they easy to follow? Hard to follow? Why?

3. In my survey a large portion of respondents discussed partnering with OVR? Do you partner with OVR? WITH any other agencies? WHY? OR Why not?

4. Many respondents discussed not having enough time to conduct transition assessments and having difficulty pulling kids from their general education CLASSROOM curriculum yet they responded that they administer transition assessments individually in the special education classroom. Is this something that you do? Have you ever considered completing the mandated assessment in the gen ed classroom by administering the assessment to all the students in the general education classroom? Do gen ed students get any sort of transition planning services?

5. How do you select transition assessments? How do you know what tools and procedures to utilize?

6. Do you feel you have adequate training to administer and interpret transition assessments? Do you have formal training? What additional training would be helpful to you?

7.   Is there anything else you want to tell me about transition assessments that that we haven't talked about?

8. I want to thank you for your time?

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