



Transitional Services for Youth and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Background

In May 2014, the committee authorized a study to identify the needs of, and services available for, individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), focusing on the transition from secondary school completion to young adulthood (up to age 25).

The adequacy and accessibility of transitional resources available from state agencies and other organizations will be reviewed. In particular, the study will examine transitional planning during secondary education, programs and services following secondary education, levels of independence attained, and barriers to independence.

Given the broad range of the autism spectrum, individuals with ASD are likely to have varying needs throughout their lifetimes in a myriad of domains such as education, vocational training and support, medical and behavioral health, activities of daily living, socialization, and community living, including financial and housing supports. Services may be accessed through a combination of public and private agencies and formal and informal supports, which are paid for by a variety of federal, state, private and family resources.

Since May, committee staff has had ongoing meetings with various state agency staff on a number of cross-cutting topics including but not limited to the State Department of Education (SDE) and the Departments of Developmental Services (DDS), Rehabilitation Services (DORS), and Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

Interviews have also been conducted with representatives of several advocacy groups, parents of children with ASD, employers, service providers, and other interested stakeholders.

Main Points

- **Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)** refers to a group of **developmental disabilities** characterized by difficulties in social interaction, communication, and repetitive behaviors. ASD presents on a broad spectrum from **mild to very severe**.
- **ASD has no definitive cause or cure.** There has been significant increase in ASD prevalence since 2000. Recent CDC report estimates ASD occurs in 1 in 68 children.
- Conservative estimates suggest **expansive growth** in the **number of CT high school students with ASD** in the upcoming years.
- State agency involvement with ASD population varies by individual's age and existence of co-diagnosis.
- There is distinction between clinical diagnosis and educational classification of ASD.
- Mandated by both federal and state law, **transition services** are defined by the Individuals with Disabilities and Education Act as a **coordinated set of activities** focused on **preparing students** for employment, further education, and other **post-school adult living** objectives.
- **Secondary transition begins in the ninth grade.** After academic requirements have been met, students may remain to receive transition services up to age 21. After age 21, adult services are eligibility-based and offered within available appropriations.
- There are many challenges in secondary transition for ASD students:
 - ASD is a spectrum, with **individual transition needs varying greatly**.
 - During the secondary school years, **not enough emphasis** may be given to **preparation for life after high school**.
 - **Adult services** are **eligibility rather than entitlement based**, with long waiting lists.

Next Steps

Examine the services and programs available for the transition of youth and young adults with ASD.

Analyze potential gaps between transitional needs and resources.

Activities to inform these efforts will include:

- Surveys of secondary transition coordinators and parents
- Analysis of data collected by state agencies
- Research on other state models and approaches