

# Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee

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## STUDY SCOPE

### Transitional Services for Youth and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder

#### Focus

This study will 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.

#### Background

According to the National Autism Association, autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by social and cognitive impairments, communication difficulties, and repetitive behaviors.<sup>1</sup> Autism is a spectrum disorder that has a wide variation in its presentation. Many individuals with ASD may also have behavioral health and medical conditions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated the prevalence of ASD among eight-year-olds to be one in 68 in 2010, a sharp increase from the one in 150 children found in 2000.<sup>2</sup>

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.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates a public education for eligible children through high school graduation or age 21, whichever is first attained. One goal of IDEA is for students to be prepared for employment and independent living.<sup>3</sup> Students with ASD are eligible for such services.

In addition to secondary schools, transitional services may also be available through the Departments of Developmental Services (DDS), Rehabilitation Services (DORS), and Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), and the Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs). Other organizations, such as Easter Seals and ARC potentially provide additional resources to assist these students in transitioning to the next phase of their lives.

<sup>1</sup> See <http://nationalautismassociation.org/resources/signs-of-autism> accessed 10/12/13

<sup>2</sup> "Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Children Aged 8 Years." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 28, 2014. <http://www.cdc.gov>

<sup>3</sup> "Why a Transition Plan?" [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org) Accessed April 24, 2014

## Areas of Analysis

1. Describe the target population
  - a. Prevalence and potential challenges of identifying Connecticut youth with ASD
  - b. Demographic characteristics
  - c. Current residential and educational settings
2. Examine current transitional services, including needs assessments, provided by state agencies and other organizations
  - a. State Department of Education and local secondary schools
  - b. Department of Developmental Services
  - c. Department of Rehabilitation Services
  - d. Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
  - e. Regional Educational Service Centers
  - f. Other organizations such as Easter Seals and ARC
3. Examine employment and vocational skills training needs of the target population
  - a. Barriers to employment and vocational skills training
  - b. Types of employment services most in demand
  - c. Preparation in this area provided during secondary education
4. Identify independent living and housing needs of the target population
  - a. Barriers to independent living and housing needs
  - b. Types of independent living and housing services most in demand
  - c. Preparation in this area provided during secondary education
5. Analyze potential gaps between service demand and resources
  - a. Level of awareness of service or program
  - b. Adequacy of systems and processes used to provide services to the target population
  - c. Capacity of service or program
  - d. Existence of waiting lists or other indicators of program capacity limitations
6. Assess effectiveness of services and programs
  - a. Evidence of effectiveness of service or program
  - b. Availability of outcome data for program or service, or systems in place to capture such information in the future
  - c. Identification of model programs within and outside of Connecticut

## Areas Not Under Review

The target population for this study includes ASD youth (aged 15-17) and young adults (aged 18-25). Children (aged 0 up to 15 years old) and older adults (over age 25) are excluded from this study as the focus is on youth and young adults completing their formal secondary education and transitioning to adulthood.

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