



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 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 was reviewed. The study examined transitional planning during secondary education, programs and services following secondary education, levels of independence attained, and barriers to independence.

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.

Committee staff had ongoing meetings on a number of cross-cutting topics with various state agency staff from the Departments of Education (CSDE), Developmental Services (DDS), Rehabilitation Services (DORS), and Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

Interviews and a public hearing were held with representatives of several advocacy groups, parents of children with ASD, employers, service providers, and other interested stakeholders.

Staff conducted a literature review and two surveys of transition coordinators and parents to collect original data. Tours and visits were taken to a variety of programs and autism-related fairs and meetings.

Main Staff Findings

- There is a need to strengthen transitional services during high school.
- High schools, parents, students, and colleges can take steps to increase the likelihood of successful college experience.
- Employment is a major barrier for individuals with ASD transitioning to independence.
- New and creative ways of developing housing solutions must be examined to address the oncoming wave of individuals with ASD.
- With proper supports, individuals with ASD may live on their own, be employed, and participate in community activities.
- A strong solid infrastructure must be in place if the state is to meet the demand for ASD services, which already exceeds capacity.

PRI Staff Recommendations

Education. Begin the transition process sooner; implement the Student Success Plan; train transition coordinators; use an IEP checklist; and distribute useful publications to parents on transition.

Post-Secondary Education. Reduce reliance on supports while in high school; have students participate in a bridge program or 'boot camp' prior to college; and replicate several promising programs across state higher education system.

Employment/Vocational. Provide transitional services-only; prepare families for logistical burdens of employment; encourage participation in summer employment; establish central DDS position for employment; and develop a shared definition of competitive employment.

Independent Living. Establish ASD housing coordinator position; assist families to develop housing plans; establish a one-stop housing information resource for individuals with ASD; produce a report on the present and future ASD residential needs with best practices guidelines and plan of action.

Supports. Consider expanding ASD coverage to non-Medicaid insurance plans; survey families on ASD waiver waitlist; establish advisory subcommittees on transportation and life skills; create interim ASD family grant program; consider legislation for tax-free accounts; additional ASD resource specialist; provide 'ASD only' families access to education and transition advisors.

System Infrastructure. Establish shared agency data system; explore opportunities for coordination of state level work on ASD; identify flexible, diversified, and sustainable funding; promote more outreach to key stakeholders; continue building ASD training infrastructure; and prepare an annual progress report on ASD accomplishments and activities.