

Transition

A Report on  
Minnesota Youth  
with Disabilities



Minnesota Department of Education

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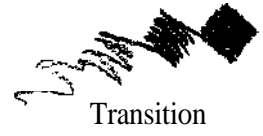
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A Report on  
Minnesota Youth  
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## Foreword

Transition from special education to secondary vocational education and postsecondary education, training, employment, and community living has become a special education priority of the Minnesota Department of Education. Efforts at defining the issues were initiated in 1981 by vocational education, vocational rehabilitation, and special education services in Minnesota. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services identified the provision of transition services as a federal priority.

Since that time the State Transition Interagency Committee (STIC) has been expanded to include 10 agencies and organizations, a state interagency agreement has been negotiated, a five year supported employment project has been initiated, a federal parent training grant was funded, the University Affiliated Program on Developmental Disabilities was established at the University of Minnesota, and became involved in numerous projects, and a number of local model transition projects were initiated at the local level. All of these and other activities verify the interest of many, many persons in

Minnesota to become involved in resolving issues related to transition of students from school to work and community living issues.

It would be impossible to individually thank all of the persons who have been and continue to be involved in resolving the transition issues. I would especially like to thank the members of the STIC committee for their many, many hours negotiating agency responsibilities and the University Affiliated Program on Developmental Disabilities for providing technical assistance in completing this Report. I would especially like to thank Barbara Troolin, Office of Transition, for her outstanding leadership abilities in negotiating and implementing state level strategies to encourage coordination of services at the local level for secondary aged students who are handicapped.

Numerous activities, including this Report, are but a beginning to the future efforts that are needed to fully ensure the coordination of the services for these students. Our real challenges are yet before us.

Norena A. Hale, Ph.D.  
Manager, Unique Learner  
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## Introduction

**M**Meet Mee—She is 19 and nearing graduation from her local high school. Mee has received special education and related services support since elementary school. Her special education teacher, Mr. Allia, is trained to work with students with hearing impairments. A glance at her program plan shows activities like meal preparation, community awareness and work experience.

Mee lives at home with her parents and a younger sister. Mee and her family enjoy soccer, rental movies and church activities. One of Mee's strengths is her social skills. She always wears a smile and loves to meet people. Like most teenagers, she is enjoying her school experiences.

Soon, Mee and her family will be faced with some very difficult decisions. What happens to students like Mee, after they leave public education? This "transition" for Mee, may be extremely difficult without thinking ahead about where to live, work and socialize in her community. Questions faced by families about looking for work, living away from home, having fun and using community services are often asked too late for adequate planning to occur.

Better and earlier planning to enhance opportunities for disabled youth are discussed in this Report. Picture Mee or a student with disabilities you know as the issues are discussed, needs of individuals are examined and suggestions are made to help resolve the dilemma of leaving school with nowhere to go.

## Background

**W**e all experience many common transitions as part of normal life. The time of graduation and leaving school is one of the most significant events in our lives. Finishing high school means a change in personal relationships. Communities expect individuals to assume new roles and responsibilities as adults. Success in our society often is measured by one's ability to work and live independently. Though most of us adapt successfully with little help, a certain amount of stress is experienced by each of us and our family members at this critical time.

At the present time, large numbers of students in special education are about to complete their school career to confront the many new challenges of adult life. There is growing information that tells us that the goals of employment, community living, and social and leisure opportunities are not being realized by

many youth with disabilities. Recent studies report that between 50% to 75% of working age adults with disabilities are not employed (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1983). Parents regularly note that insufficient coordination between schools and community service agencies is a significant barrier to the development of effective transition (Halpern, Close and Nelson, 1986; Wehman, Kregel and Barcus, 1985).

## Minnesota's Response

In response to these growing concerns, Minnesota has placed a high priority on improving the transition experiences of graduating special education students. The goal of this Report is to increase the awareness of policy makers, professionals, parents and the general public regarding the current status of Minnesota's efforts to assist students and families to make the successful transition from school to work and community living.



*Students and families are faced with many decisions as they leave secondary education.*



## PART I:

### THE CHARGE

#### The Legislative Report on Transition

The Legislature has directed the Commissioner of Education to prepare a Report concerning the transition of youth with disabilities from school to post-secondary education and employment. The importance of family involvement, and the need for effective cooperation among agencies in providing quality educational and other service programs that address the total needs youth with disabilities needs to be stressed.

*Part I. The Charge*, discusses the roles and responsibilities of education and other community service agencies in addressing the life long needs of people with disabilities.

*Part II. The Need*, presents Minnesota studies addressing the preparation of students for post-school experiences.

*Part III The Momentum*, describes Minnesota's progress to date in strengthening transition services.

*Part IV. The Future*, discusses future state and local initiatives needed to improve transition services and cooperation among service agencies.

Policy makers, professionals, parents and the public may find this information useful in examining local services and planning efforts that are

needed to assist students who are about to complete secondary special education.

#### Special Education in Minnesota:

##### The Federal Mandate

The Education of All Handicapped Children Act P.L. 94-142 passed by Congress in 1975 and, amended in 1984 and 1986, has provided opportunities for all children and youth to receive the benefits of public education. The law makes many assurances including:

- No handicapped child can be excluded from education.
- A free and appropriate education must be provided at public expense with no cost to parents or guardians for every handicapped child.
- Appropriately designed programs of instruction and services must be developed to meet the unique educational needs of each student.
- Each handicapped child, including children in public and private institutions, must be educated in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent possible with children who are not handicapped.
- Parents must have a say in and consent to all assessment and placement decisions regarding their handicapped child's education prior to those services being provided.

#### THE INTERAGENCY OFFICE ON TRANSITION SERVICES

In 1985 the Minnesota State Legislature established the Interagency Office on Transition Services. This office is administered through the Unique Learner Needs Section of the Minnesota Department of Education. As set forth in legislation, the Office is charged with several major responsibilities. These responsibilities include:

- 1) gather and coordinate information on transition services for secondary age handicapped pupils;
- 2) provide information, consultation, and technical assistance to state and local agencies involved in the delivery of services to handicapped pupils in transition from secondary school programs to employment and postsecondary education programs;
- 3) assist Minnesota agencies in establishing local interagency agreements to ensure that the necessary services for efficient and appropriate transition from school to work and postsecondary education programs are available; and
- 4) assist regions and local areas in planning interagency inservice training to develop and improve transition services.

The overall mission of the Interagency Office on Transition Services is to coordinate interagency planning that will provide handicapped students exiting Minnesota's public schools with postschool options including choices about employment, living arrangements, social life and family involvements. To accomplish this, active partnerships between families, the student, and community service agencies need to be built.



### Services To Students and Their Families

The need for special education services is identified at the local level by instructional staff, specialists, and parents all working closely together. The process begins with the recognition of a child's potential need for special education and parent consent for assessment. Once a special education need has been verified, the local team of professionals and parents conduct a conference to identify the student's specific needs and design the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP). This plan also identifies the specific conditions and obligations of the school to provide special education services. Annual goals, short term objectives, services to be provided and a formal plan for program review are addressed in the IEP.

### Special Education Enrollments

In Minnesota, special education services are mandatory for children ages 3 to 21. The 1985 unduplicated child count reports that 81,578 children received special education services in Minnesota's 434 school districts. Table 1 shows

*"Minnesota families of youth with disabilities want positive school and post-school experiences. We speak of many transitions in a persons life, but finishing school is an opportunity for school and community service providers to collaborate on planning for the future. We all must share in this responsibility."*

Dr. Ruth Randall  
Commissioner of Education

the unduplicated child count for students 14-21 years of age currently receiving secondary special education services.

### Future Graduates

In 1986, approximately 5,750 Minnesota special education students turned 18 years old, compared to only 2,100 in 1983 (Minnesota Department of Education, 1985). This increase is principally due to a large influx of children with handicaps to special education since the passage of the

Federal Education For All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) in 1975. More than a decade has passed and many of these students are about to complete their special education programs.

Projections based on Minnesota Department of Education unduplicated child count data estimates that from 1987 into the 1990s, approximately 6,000 handicapped students will be exiting public education each year. Table 2 shows the estimated number of stu-

**TABLE 2**  
Estimated Number of Students Who Leave Special Education in Minnesota: 1980-1985 (Ages 15 and Over)

YEAR	TOTAL NUMBER LEAVING SPECIAL EDUCATION
1980	4,821
1981	5,377
1982	4,262
1984	5,863
1985	5,745

(SOURCE: Minnesota Department of Education, 1985)

dents who completed their special education program from 1980-1985. While the number of students who complete their special education program continues to rise, a slight decline in the total num-

**TABLE 1**  
SPECIAL EDUCATION UNDUPLICATED CHILD COUNT DECEMBER 1, 1985

AGE	SPEECH HAN DI- CAPPED	EDUCABLE MENTALLY RETARDED	TRAINABLE MENTALLY RETARDED	PHYSICALLY HANDI- CAPPED	HEARING IMPAIRED	VISUALLY IMPAIRED	LEARNING DISABLED	EMOTION- ALLY DISTURBED	DEAF AND BLIND	HEALTH IMPAIRED OTHER AUTISTIC	TOTAL	
14	261	781	260	84	85	28	3,390	1,176	0	53	7	6,125
15	181	803	252	72	76	22	3,309	1,310	2	52	6	6,085
16	123	723	257	67	77	28	2,927	1,080	0	39	5	5,326
17	89	717	289	52	73	19	2,476	841	2	28	5	4,591
18	47	414	264	35	39	7	1,012	268	1	12	8	2,107
19-21	13	146	548	13	10	5	167	71	3	1	9	986
+ 21	0	1	8	0	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	18
TOTAL	714	3,585	1,878	323	360	110	13,289	4,746	8	185	40	25,238

(SOURCE: Minnesota Department of Education, 1985)



ber of non-handicapped graduates will continue to be experienced over this same time period in Minnesota as well as nationally. This anticipated increase in the number of graduates and reports of high unemployment among special education program completers have prompted significant action at the federal level.

### **The Federal Transition Initiative**

In 1983, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) identified transition from school to work as one of the major federal priorities of special education programs across the nation. The rationale for bringing about the federal transition initiative was included in amendments to the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 98-199:

"The subcommittee (on the handicapped) recognizes the overwhelming paucity of effective programming for these handicapped youth which eventually accounts for unnecessarily large numbers of handicapped adults who become unemployed and therefore dependent on society. These youth historically have not been adequately prepared for the changes and demands of life after school. In addition, few, if any, are able to access or appropriately use traditional transitional services. Few services have been designed to assist handicapped young people in their efforts to enter the labor force or attain their goals of becoming self-sufficient adults



and contributing members of our society. (Section 626, P.L. 98-199)

This statement emphasizes the growing concerns of students, their families and future service providers. While the federal transition initiative is not a mandate, it is essential that state and local educational planners view it as an opportunity to initiate efforts to improve the quality of services at the community level.

"Special education must provide our youth with opportunities for higher education, competitive work, or supported employment. It is time that by working together, we can help all citizens to achieve these outcomes along with the personal status in community inte-

*We must build opportunities/or living, working and learning in our communities.*

gration that they create. (Madeline, Will, Assistant Secretary OSERS, 1984).

### **A Shared Responsibility with Community Services**

Community service agencies also have responsibilities in assisting youth with disabilities make the transition from school to adult living and working situations. In examining the role of community service agencies, the essence of the word "community" should be stressed. Community means being a part of something, being with family and experiencing friendships, making a contribution to something, and in return feeling a sense of belonging. A recent Minnesota report stresses the importance of these values in designing human service systems:

The goal of human service systems should be to assist individuals with disabilities to grow, develop, live, learn, work and participate to the fullest extent in *community life*. The underlying principles of effective service delivery are *responsiveness* to individuals, *community integration* and *quality* of services. (Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities, 1984: Toward a Developmental Disabilities Policy Agenda: Assuring Futures of Quality).

Minnesota proudly hosts an extensive number of community service agencies. These agencies provide an array of post-secondary education, vocational training and employment services, and provide for individual options for residential, health, and social and recreational experiences.

Individuals completing their special education program have the same basic needs anyone has for employment, post-secondary education, housing, health services, and opportunities to recreate in communities. In order for people with disabilities to access the community, however, special assistance and cooperation among service agencies are often required. It should be recognized that because services and responsibility areas differ widely, effective coordination is sometimes difficult to achieve. Difficulties in achieving comprehensive interagency cooperation are even more pronounced in rural areas. Long distances between

schools and service agencies, differing economic conditions, and low population base pose additional barriers to interagency planning.

"State education agencies and local school systems alone cannot meet the transition needs of disabled youth. But education officials can provide crucial leadership and enter into cooperative programs with other state and local social service agencies and providers" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1986).

The need for local education agencies to work collaboratively with other community service agencies is well established. Efforts to achieve greater cooperation has been a long standing federal commitment. The initiative for increasing interagency collaboration has already been established at the federal level through written joint policy statements between the offices of special education programs and community health services, and between vocational education and vocational rehabilitation

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*"Prepare my daughter as much as possible with the help of her family to be able to find and maintain employment, live as independently as possible, feel successful and good about herself"*

(Parent of a student receiving special education)

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(Schalock, 1985). For years, the federal government has urged states to develop interagency agreements, and improve planning for individuals through service coordination, especially at the local level. Minnesota is among those states currently developing such agreements.

"The ultimate charge is to provide the best services possible to assure quality lifestyles for persons with disabilities in Minnesota." (Minnesota State Transition Interagency Committee, 1986).

## PART II

### THE NEED

#### What Happens to Students After Graduation?

The recent increased attention to the transition years has evolved from growing concerns from professionals, parents and policy makers about the post-school difficulties youth with disabilities experience in adult life.

#### "DID YOU KNOW THAT..."

- 250,000 to 300,000 special education students leave their educational programs annually (U.S. Department of Education, 1984)—many will have needs for ongoing community services.
- Between 50 and 75% of adults with disabilities are unemployed (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1983)—this is over eight times the rate of nondisabled persons.
- Only one in four of those adults with disabilities who do work, work full time (Harris Poll, 1986)—underemployment remains a problem.
- Over three-fourths—76%—of women with disabilities are out of the labor force entirely (1980 Census Data)—equity in employment is still a concern for many women with disabilities.
- 38% of individuals with disabilities say that they are under educated and have no

marketable skills (Harris Poll, 1986)—this creates substantial barriers to working full time.

- Individuals with disabilities earn much less than individuals who are non-disabled (1980 Census Data)—many are at or below the poverty level.

#### Introducing Minnesota Studies

The extent to which special education programs are successfully preparing students for adult life has been the subject of recent state level studies in Minnesota. These studies provide useful information on the present status of transition services in Minnesota and address the specific question of:

- 1) "How do our graduates fare in the community?"
- 2) "How well do we prepare students and assist families for transition?"
- 3) "What are the barriers to effective transition service and coordination?"

#### How Do Our Graduates Fare in the Community?

One of the most important questions that public schools should begin to address is what happens to youth with disabilities after they complete their special education program? The results of the Minnesota Post-school Follow-Up Study (1984-87) regarding the community experiences of over 400 former special education students point out several concerns.

For example:

- 9% of former students with moderate/severe handicaps have full-time paid employment; another 32% have part-time employment.
- 54% of former students with mild handicaps have full-time paid employment; another 28% have part-time employment.
- 25% of former students with mild handicaps and 1% with moderate/severe handicaps former students are living on their own; most students with mild handicaps are living with parents (61%) and most with moderate/severe handicaps interviewed are in group home residential placements (59%).
- A main concern reported by former students is loneliness—few have friends, most spend a lot of time watching TV and have a minimal social life.
- Parents have significant concerns about what will happen to their children when they can no longer care for them.
- The primary leisure activity of former students with both mild handicaps (58%) and moderate/severe handicaps (60%) is watching TV, listening to the radio, or listening to records.
- 83% of former students with mild handicaps have their driver's license, 46% have a checking account, and 49% have a credit card.

These findings are consistent with similar national studies on the post-school experiences of former special education students (Halpern, et al., 1986; Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Mithaug &

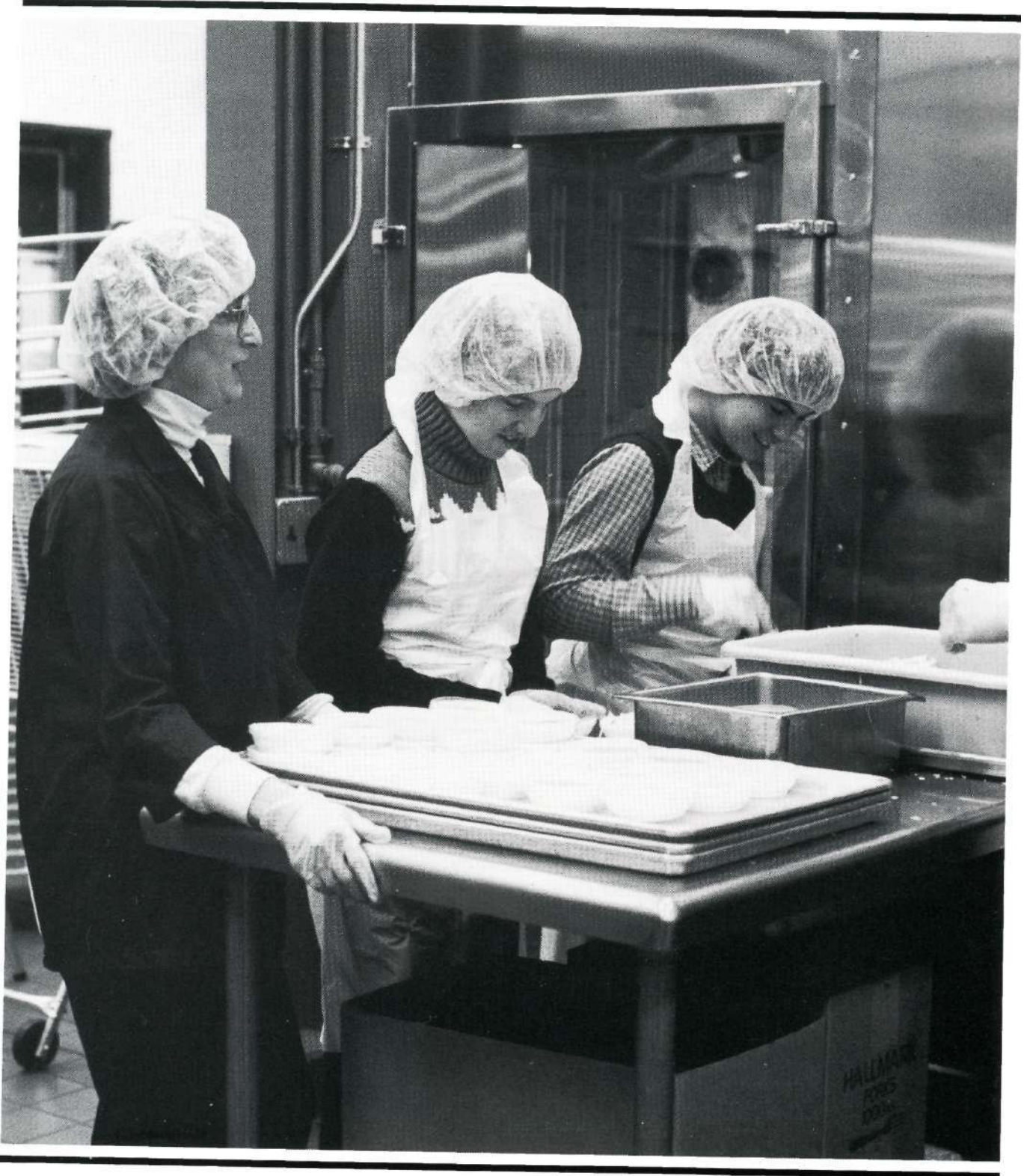
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Horiuchi, 1983; Wehman, et al., 1985)- These studies reveal a repeated pattern of unemployment or underemployment, social isolation, and dependence on others for many basic adult needs. There are many factors contributing to the difficulties youth with disabilities experience after leaving school. The most essential factors that contribute to post-school success, however, are how well schools prepare students for adult life, the quality and availability of adult services in the community.

**How Well Do We Prepare Students and Provide Assistance to Families?**

In order to address the question as to how well we are preparing students and assisting families for transition, a statewide needs assessment was recently conducted by the Unique Learner Needs Section of the Minnesota Department of Education. The findings of this study (1986) with approximately 400 survey responses, provide useful information which reflects both on the adequacy of school programs in preparing students and assistance currently being provided to parents.

*Ongoing support is offered to this team of student workers by a job coach.*

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*"Prepare my daughter as much as possible with the help of her family to be able to find and maintain employment, live as independently as possible, feel successful and good about herself"*

(Parent of a student receiving special education)

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**Preparing Students for Transition**

The findings of the Minnesota Transition Needs Assessment Study illustrate some concern for how well students are being prepared for adult life. Survey results show that:

- Professionals stated that current school assessment and instructional practices were only moderately helpful in planning for the post-school needs of youth with disabilities. Parents held similar views.
- Parents and professionals felt

strongly that it was very important to prepare students for future adult life activities such as employment, community living, citizenship, and other areas. Overall, however, both groups felt that schools were doing only moderately well in these areas.

- 42% of the parents reported that their son/daughter has received vocational assessment services. 27% reported, however, that these results had not been discussed with them. Most felt that this information was only moderately useful in planning for post-school education and employment.
- Parents reported that their son/daughter is or will be only somewhat prepared for adult life.

The successful transition to post-secondary education, employment and community living begins with adequate preparation and planning for those environments by school personnel. Parents participating in the study felt that in order to improve the over-

**Minnesota Transition Needs Assessment Study**

Under contract from the Unique Learner Needs Section of the Minnesota Department of Education, The University Affiliated Program on Developmental Disabilities at the University of Minnesota conducted a statewide needs assessment on transition services. The study completed in 1986 included approximately 300 professionals representing special education directors, special education and vocational education teachers, vocational rehabilitation counselors and county social workers. A sec-

ond group of over 100 parents whose children were nearing the time of graduation were also surveyed. Information was collected on current special education assessment and instructional practices used to prepare students for adult life. Other information was collected on how well schools and community agencies presently plan for a student's transition and what type of assistance is being provided to individuals and families after graduation.

all preparation of students for adult living, schools should:

- Begin preparing students to assume adult roles and responsibilities early in their educational career.
- Provide a balance of independent living, vocational, social and academic training.
- Increase opportunities for practical hands-on experiences in the community.
- Provide assessment of student vocational and community living interests and abilities.
- Focus instruction on functional skills such as managing time, apartment living, handling money and using private and public transportation.

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*Individualized instruction and adaptations are provided for a student new on the job.*

*Student from St. Paul schools proudly handles a job task independently.*



### **Assisting Families For Transition**

The active participation of families in planning during their child's adolescent years is essential for assuring continuity between school and adult services. Once their child completes their school program, parents often remain the single point of contact with community services agencies. For parents of more severely handicapped adolescents, several services may have to be coordinated across agencies which provide vocational, residential, health and recreational services.

Negotiating this network of services can be a very stressful experience for families.

Even though the importance of involving and assisting parents and families in planning for transition is recognized, the Minnesota Transition Needs Assessment Study revealed several concerns related to involving and assisting parents. The study found that:

- 51% of the parents reported that Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals and objectives related to the post school needs of their son/daughter



were not being discussed with them.

- Professionals and parents felt strongly that students should actively participate in IEP conferences related to planning for their post-school experiences. However, 43% of the parents reported that their son/daughter was not included in IEP conferences.
- 43% of the parents reported that post-school plans were not being discussed with their son/daughter. Fifty-one percent of the parents indicated that they view themselves as the primary individuals responsible for discussing such plans with their child.
- Parents and professionals strongly agreed that the most essential individuals who should actively participate in planning for transition include the student, their parent(s), the special education teacher and vocational rehabilitation counselor.
- 52% of the parents communicated that they were not familiar with the types of community services available for their son/daughter following the transition from school. There was no clear consensus on whether the school, community service agencies or both should be responsible for collecting and sharing this information with parents.

Active family participation is important for a number of reasons. Research studies have shown that handicapped children achieve more when their parents are involved in the process of education (Bronfenbrenner, 1976;

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*"The transition for parents is just as traumatic as for the handicapped child. It is a passage feared and expected..."*

(Parent of a student receiving special education)

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Solomon, Wilson and Galey, 1982). Other research has shown that the major predictor of success in job retention of individuals with severe handicaps is parental support (Moon and Beale, 1985).

There are other reasons why schools should take an active role in assisting parents for transition. One critical area concerns the fact that adult services, unlike special education, are not considered entitlement programs. Special education must provide services to all children who qualify for service. Adult service providers are not bound by such an encompassing mandate. In order to effectively work with adult service providers and to help parents make informed decisions about their child's future, parents need to develop an understanding of the types of services, eligibility requirements for those services, and available financial assistance. Information on the availability of services in local communities must also be made known to parents to reduce the chances of having their child placed on long waiting lists for a particular service. These concerns emphasize the need to provide ongoing assistance in planning with families.

### **Assisting Students Following Graduation**

Providing assistance to students and their family after the time of completing school is also an important consideration in comprehensive planning for transition. Parents responding in the Minnesota Transition Needs Assessment Study communicated a critical need for follow-up assistance for their son/daughter after graduation. Assistance was needed by recent graduates to seek and maintain employment, establish social relationships, maintain their own living quarters, apply to colleges and vocational training schools, and use private and public transportation to travel independently in their community.

Results of the needs assessment study reveal, however, that formal follow-up services are not readily available. The study found that:

- 73% of the professionals reported that there is no follow-up process used by the school to assure that post-school services anticipated as being needed by students were actually being received. However, these same professionals felt that such procedures were important for the post-school success of graduates.
- 74% of the professionals reported that school districts do not regularly collect information on post-school experiences of students with handicaps who have already graduated. They felt that this information would be extremely important in determining curriculum, and in planning and working with families.



In identifying ways to improve post-school follow-up services, the professional respondents communicated that a single adult service agency should be given this responsibility. The specific adult service agency identified to provide this follow-up service included the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Human Services through local county services, or post-secondary vocational education programs.

**What are the Barriers to Effective Transition Planning and Coordination?**

Many graduates of special education programs require little or no assistance in accessing universities, community colleges, post-secondary vocational education, or employment following the time of leaving school. Other persons with disabilities require extensive ongoing services throughout their lifetime to achieve the goals of employment and community living. Transition planning should be comprehensive enough to address the needs of all individuals leaving our schools. Service coordination, however, is often difficult to achieve due to a number of reasons. These include communication difficulties regarding services provided and clients served, territorial issues related to rules and regulations, differing procedures and eligibility requirements, and issues related to geographical conditions, especially in rural areas. Several sources of information provide a closer look at barriers within our state.

In 1984 a survey of Minnesota

special education directors was conducted by the Minnesota Severely Handicapped Delivery System Project at the University of Minnesota. Several problems were identified which prevent the effective transition between school and adult service providers. Problems in developing local interagency planning were reportedly due to:

- Participant's lack of knowledge about methods of developing systematic goals and/or objectives for meeting the transition needs of students.
- Lack of knowledge about systematic methods for planning and managing interagency groups.
- Barriers to communication due to outdated relationships and agency turf issues.
- Lack of commitment to a long term interagency planning process necessary to develop effective relationships between agencies.

In 1985, the Unique Learner Needs Section of the Minnesota

Department of Education established a task force to develop recommendations to achieve interagency cooperation for transition. The Task Force was composed of 60 persons representing various agencies and parents of youth and adults with disabilities in Minnesota. The Task Force that met in Alexandria helped develop a report that highlighted the following problems as significant barriers to state and local cooperation:

- The term transition is neither clearly defined nor well understood by all key personnel in state and local agencies responsible for providing services to secondary-aged and young adult students/clients.
- The existence of state agency level interagency agreements do not necessarily always trans-

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*These learning activities are designed to relate to future environments of employment and community participation.*

**Minnesota Post-school Follow-Up Study**

The University Affiliated Program on Developmental Disabilities at the University of Minnesota is presently concluding a three-year evaluation project (1984-1987) funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. The research is examining the post-school experiences of approximately 100 individuals with moderate/severe handicaps and a second group of over 300 individuals with mild handicaps. Subjects

were predominantly former special education students of the Minneapolis and Moundsview school districts. Surveys and intensive interviews were conducted on individuals who were in secondary special education programs either 3 to 5 years or 8 to 10 years before the study. Information was collected on the current employment, residential, and social status of each subject.



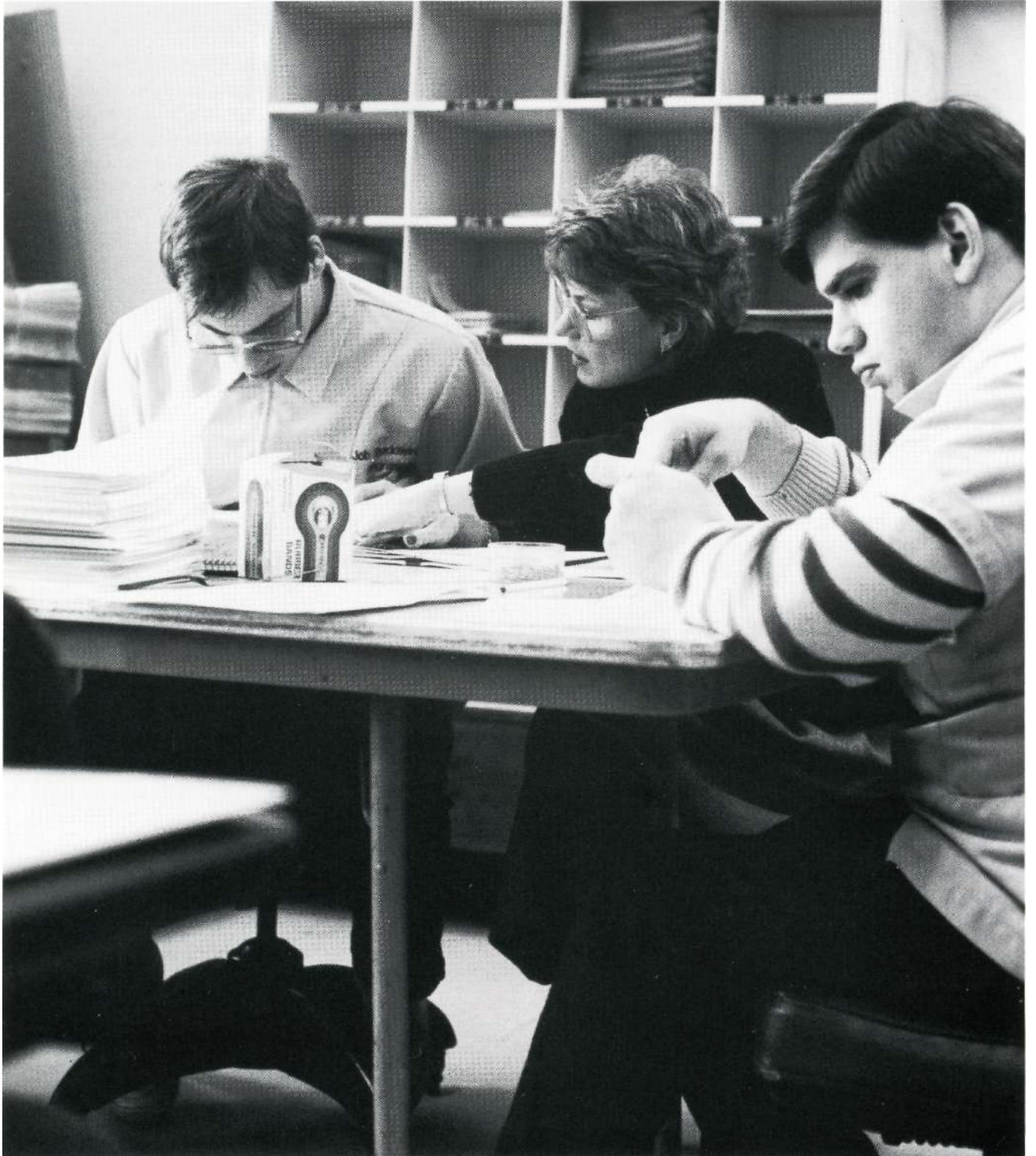
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late into the provision of cooperative services at the local level.

- Current practices of coordination and cooperation among providers of services to persons with disabilities tend to be informal and need to be improved if transition services are to be effectively achieved in Minnesota.
- The majority of students and youth with moderate to severe disabilities in Minnesota do not now face genuine opportunities to achieve meaningful employment.
- Local interagency cooperation lacks leadership due to inadequately trained personnel who can effectively operate and manage representative agency groups.

Another significant barrier facing youth with disabilities leaving the school system is significant shortages in community residential and vocational service programs. Community agencies are simply not equipped to handle the numbers of persons with disabilities needing their services. A recent report by the Governor's Planning Council on Develop-

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*"When you're in school, everythings goes along reasonably well, but after graduation you are all on your own..."*

(Parent of a student receiving special education)

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mental Disabilities (1984) entitled *"Developmental Disabilities and Public Policy: A Review for Policy Makers"* concludes that day programs are plagued by fiscal and other constraints that result in:

- Unstable funding bases resulting in cuts in service;
- Wide variation in program availability and levels of service;
- Inadequate standards and monitoring of programs; and
- Extensive waiting lists are found to be commonplace.

As we tackle the transition problems, we must make sure that appropriate community services are available to all persons with disabilities who need them. A report on youth with disabilities

exiting public education was conducted by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) in 1986. It concluded that coordination between public schools and adult service providers must be enhanced to bring about the planning and program development necessary to build services to respond to the needs of adults with disabilities in our communities. The Council of Chief State School Officers, in its 1986 position paper on *Disabled Students Beyond School: A Review of the Issues*, has recommended that state education departments take the lead in identifying adequate transition services for handicapped students. They further recommended coordination and analysis of state data bases required by both the schools and adult service agencies, and the development of state and local education and business partnerships. Positive action on these objectives, however, will require the ideas, cooperation, and commitment of all service providers, parents and community leaders to overcome many of the barriers to effective interagency coordination of services.

## PART III

### THE MOMENTUM

#### The Interagency Office on Transition Services

While there remains much to do there are several promising activities currently underway in Minnesota. One example is the newly established Interagency Office on Transition Services. This office has been active in gathering and coordinating information on transition services in Minnesota, providing information and technical assistance to local education agencies, assisting local communities in establishing interagency agreements to improve cooperation, and conducting regional training workshops to provide information on interagency planning for transition. A summary of the first year's accomplishments and activities include:

- During 1985-86 over 850 parents and professionals throughout the state participated in 11 regional transition awareness and interagency planning workshops.
- The Minnesota Transition Training Manual providing information on community services and interagency planning, was published and distributed to over 1200 individuals and agencies throughout the state and nation.
- The Office participated in developing the proposed Minnesota Interagency Cooperative Agreement on transition.
- The Minnesota Transition

Needs Assessment Study was conducted. A total of 393 parents and professionals participated, representing all regions of the state.

- Onsite consultation and assistance was provided to the 11 educational service units around the state.
- Ongoing collaboration with secondary vocational education to develop a cooperative policy and procedural manual for planning vocational education options for secondary handicapped students. This procedural manual will specify the roles and responsibilities of special education and vocational education regarding assessment, program planning, and student placement.

These activities were accomplished through the cooperation of many state and local agencies as well as parent groups. During the year a high degree of responsiveness to improve state and local transition planning efforts was recognized. In the upcoming year, the Interagency Office of Transition Services will conduct approximately six training workshops statewide, disseminate information on interagency planning, prepare a technical report on the status of transition services in Minnesota, and continue to develop and disseminate relevant materials to educational and other community service agencies.

#### State Interagency Cooperation and Agreement

In 1982, Special Education, Vocational Education and Vocational Rehabilitation agencies initiated

dialogue and developed Minnesota's first state level Interagency Cooperative Agreement between these key agencies. This initial agreement reflected the commitment of these agencies to provide quality services to children and youth with disabilities through improved service coordination and planning. In follow up to these activities the State Transition Interagency Committee (STIC) was established in 1984. Agency representation has been increased and the Committee's essential focus is on collaborative interagency planning to improve transition services statewide.

The mission of the State Transition Interagency Committee is to ensure that state and local agencies work together to develop a system of services so that all Minnesotans with disabilities have the opportunity to live and work in the community as independently as possible. The three broad objectives to be accomplished in Minnesota over the next few years include:

- To improve service planning and coordination for individuals;
- To form multi-disciplinary interagency planning teams at the school and community level to facilitate the transition from school to post-secondary education, employment and community living; and
- To continue ongoing statewide planning and develop policies, standards, practices and funding mechanisms to create an equitable statewide system of community-based transition services.

The State Transition Inter-



gency Committee includes representatives from several community services agencies and parents.

**Other Developments**

Several other recent developments in Minnesota are underway to expand and improve services to persons with disabilities. Minnesota was a recent recipient of a five year, 2.5 million dollar federal grant to develop services for individuals with the most severe disabilities to work at community job sites. This federal *Supported Employment Project* is a major collaborative effort between the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Minnesota Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities, Department of Human Services, and the Department of Education. Improved employment opportunities through ongoing support for persons with the most severe disabilities is the goal of this project. The overall evolution of policies and services related to employment in Minnesota has shifted from the institutional approach to an individualized, supported employment approach with many stages in-between (Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities, 1987).

*PACER Center*, a parent advocacy organization has achieved national attention for its work in assisting parents in securing the rights of children to receive special education services. *PACER Center* conducts training and develops educational materials for

parents and special education students, other advocacy groups, and professionals on issues specifically related to transition. *PACER Center* was the recent recipient of a three year federal grant award from the U.S. Department of Education to conduct student and parent training on transition.

*The University Affiliated Program on Developmental Disabilities (UAP)* at the University of Minnesota provides interdisciplinary training, conducts research and offers cooperative assistance to state and local agencies in the areas of service and program planning. The UAP is presently engaged in several key federal, state and local projects which include the school to work transition, vocational education, interagency planning, case management services, community residential services, assessment and others.

At the federal level a significant financial commitment has been made by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, (OSERS) to conduct *local research* and develop *demonstration projects* on transition. Over the past three years, in excess of 20 million dollars has been directed to these efforts. Minnesota has benefited from the availability of federal funds to support several local projects.

In 1986 the Northeast Metropolitan Intermediate School District #916 received federal funds to develop a demonstration project for

<p align="center"><b>STATE TRANSITION INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE</b></p> <p>Client Assistance Project/Legal Advocacy for Developmentally Disabled Persons in Minnesota          Department of Education          Secondary Vocational Education Section          Special Education Section          Interagency Office on Transition Services          Department of Human Services          Division of Mental Retardation          Department of Jobs and Training          State Jobs Training Office          Job Training Partnership Act          Division of Rehabilitation Services          State Services for the Blind          Vocational Rehabilitation          Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER)          State Board of Vocational Technical Education          State Community College System          State Planning Agency          Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities</p>
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severely handicapped youth. This demonstration project will develop effective assessment, curriculum and planning methods to help students in transition. For the past three years Minneapolis Public Schools has received federal support to develop a community based independent living skills training program for students with severe disabilities 16 to 21 years of age. These are but two select examples of the types of projects currently being supported by OSERS.

## PART IV

### THE FUTURE

This report has addressed many issues and concerns regarding the transition of youth from school to work, postsecondary education and community living. The *Charge, Need, and Momentum* carry us forward to focus on the *Future*. While progress is being made throughout Minnesota, much more must be undertaken to improve the school and post-school experiences of youth with disabilities. When parents face and ask the critical question: "What does the future hold for my child?," there must be an appropriate response with an effective plan of action.

#### SUMMARY OF THE STATUS OF TRANSITION

*How do our students fare in the community?*

Better planning for a student's future in the community is needed. The national and Minnesota studies cited in this report illustrate the substantial problems youth with disabilities experience following their school program. High levels of unemployment, limit difficulties in accessing post-secondary education, personal isolation and limited social interactions with non-handicapped citizens, are being experienced by far too many graduates. This strongly suggests that concerted efforts among education and community service agencies must be immediately undertaken to expand employment and community living options for all youth, to

include even those with the most severe disabilities.

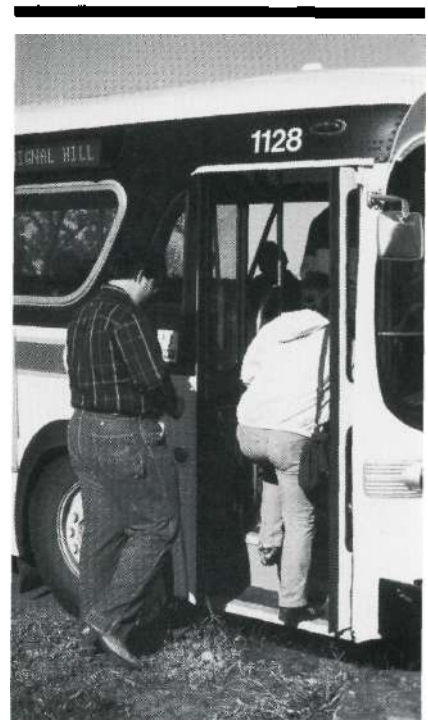
*How well do we prepare students and provide assistance to families?*

Communicated throughout this report is the convincing message that interagency cooperation must systematically occur to improve the post-school experiences of youth with disabilities. Planning between schools and community service agencies must begin long before a student completes their educational program. Families must become an integral and essential partner in educational decision making and planning. The Minnesota Transition Needs Assessment Study revealed numerous deficiencies. Deficiencies were found in our present methods of preparing students for the community, in working cooperatively with community service agencies, and in helping students to access the community resources and services they need following graduation. Parents repeatedly communicated needs for more information on the availability of community services, better assistance in planning for post-school services, and ongoing assistance in securing the community services their child needs after graduation. Parents must know where to turn for support and assistance must be provided when requested. Little will be accomplished, however, without effective and systematic interagency cooperation and planning.

*What are the barriers to effective transition planning and coordination?*

The obvious benefits of inter-

agency cooperation are well recognized. Efforts to achieve greater coordination of services, however, are often confronted by significant barriers. Communication problems, turf issues, and differing eligibility standards have greatly inhibited service coordination. A renewed sense of urgency must be given to efforts to improve the coordination of services to youth with disabilities. Schools and community service agencies must begin to realize the mutual benefits of planning, coordinating and exchanging information. As partnerships grow and awareness builds, communities must identify and assess local needs for their citizens.



*Public transportation is a vehicle for community exploration.*

Overall, we have come up short in providing community living and working outcomes for many of our students that received special education services. The following recommendations center around needs that focus on *planning for individuals, transition and families, community planning and interagency cooperation, and statewide planning.*

### Planning for Individuals

In improving planning for individuals, the involvement of the secondary special education team and future service providers is essential. This interagency team must be viewed as responsible for recommending placements, services and other community resources needed for successful post-school employment and community living. A conscious effort must be made to visualize the future and identify needs for successful adult living.

1. *Formal cooperative planning that results in desired adult life outcomes must be developed between schools, families, community agencies, and the student. Future efforts to provide effective transition planning could include questions such as: "When should planning occur?", "What should these plans look like?", and "Who should be the key participants in the planning process?"* Essential to successful transition of students from school to post-secondary education, employment and community living is early planning by schools, parents, and community service agencies.
2. To better prepare students for the future, the Minnesota Department of Education will propose a legislative amendment to *require schools to formally develop transition goals and objectives* as part of the student's individualized educational program beginning at a minimum of the 9th grade, or age equivalent. The amendment is designed to ensure that planning for transition begins early in a student's education career and takes into account the special needs of the individual.
3. *Continued and increased technical assistance and planning is needed* in the area of transition. Team Training Workshops are scheduled in 1987 and 1988 to address comprehensive transition planning for individuals. Transition planning should address a student's needs for 1) post-secondary education and training, 2) employment options, 3) residential and community living alternatives, 4) social and leisure pursuits, 5) provision of case management services to provide ongoing support and assistance, 6) and arrangements for long term support, i.e., guardianship, trust funds, wills, etc.
4. If planning for quality adult life occurs, *current curricula and assessment processes must be practical and apply to everyday living situations.* Stronger connections between elementary and secondary programs need to be established. For students in secondary education programs there needs to be a



*Moving stock is a specific job task at Snyder Drug Store.*

balance between independent living, vocational and community living activities that relate to future environments.

5. *There needs to be more instruction that uses community resources and settings to enhance the learning of students.*
6. In all areas of planning and programming for students *opportunities for integration with non-handicapped peers should be emphasized.*

*Training on the job and support are given to a student working at Como Zoo.*

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## Transition and Families

The critical role families play in decision making and planning for transition should continue to be stressed. Parents should be urged to gain a sense of what the future may hold for their child. The striking reality is that the family remains the primary source for arranging for services needed by their child after graduation (Johnson, Bruininks, Thurlow, 1986). Often, there is no single service provider that follows an individual throughout their lifetime to assure that the services needed by the individual are provided.

1. School and community service agencies must take specific action to insure *the full participation of parents*. Parents must feel welcome in the planning process.
2. *Parents must be made aware of essential information and resources* on service options, service eligibility requirements, rights to service, and other information important to effective decision making and planning. A planned information exchange through brochures, newsletters, parent night, and videos must be developed and disseminated throughout the state.
3. *Student participation in planning for post-school options and services must be more fully addressed*. Students likewise need to be informed consumers as they face the challenges of adulthood. Involving the student in transition planning is important. Procedures must be developed and adopted (e.g., interview formats, interest inventories and



community experiences) to provide students with handicaps with valuable information for planning ahead.

*Parent, student and service providers discuss Mee's individual program plan, including post-school resources.*

## Community Planning and Interagency Cooperation

During the next few years, one of the most important challenges facing Minnesota's educational and community service agencies will be efforts to establish partnerships at the community level with businesses, consumers and families, and adult service providers.

1. The initiative for *increasing local interagency collaboration* has already been established at the state level through the proposed written agreement between various state offices and community service agencies. Professionals and parents strongly concur that the most pressing need in the state is to develop cooperative interagency agreements at the local level. Local agency agreements and cooperative actions must be taken to insure more effective services for handicapped youth.
2. The Minnesota Department of Education, Unique Learner Needs Section, is proposing a legislative amendment that would *require the statewide development of community interagency planning teams*. This amendment would strengthen state and local efforts to improve communication and service planning between school and community agency planners.
3. *Improved information resources on students is critically needed* by local planners on the numbers of students leaving special education programs and the types of services they will require following high school. At the community level, follow-up information is needed on graduates to provide additional direction for schools and other agencies to improve educational programs and other services.



4. Methods of collecting and sharing *information on community service availability and eligibility must be developed*. Too often, the lack of such information hinders postschool opportunities for students. Without sharing better information and increasing cooperation between individuals and agencies at the local level, it will be difficult to increase employment and community living outcomes of youth with handicaps leaving school.

### State-Wide Planning

The goal of state-wide planning is to ensure that state agencies continue working together to develop policies, standards, practices, and funding mechanisms that will create an equitable state-wide system of community-based transition services.

1. *Continued efforts to strengthen Minnesota interagency cooperation is critical*. To accomplish this, we must all share in the goal of improving services for adults with disabilities. Schools, community service agencies, families, employers, and the public must all take an active role.
2. *The State Transition Inter-agency Committee (STIC) must expand its membership* to include representatives from medical and health fields and the business community. Through the STIC committee, efforts must continue to disseminate the state agency agreement, amend or propose new policies which enhance agency service coordination and provide technical assistance to service providers. Activities are presently underway to strengthen Minnesota inter-agency cooperation, however continued efforts to improve upon this cooperation is critically needed.
3. *Local and state education agencies must report*, as part of their annual child count, the *anticipated service needs* of youth with handicaps who are leaving school. The importance of securing accurate information on both students with handicaps and service availability was emphasized in recent amendments to Public Law 94-142 as amended by P.L. 99-457. The anticipated services reporting requirement offers a unique opportunity to increase communication between schools and adult service agencies on the postschool needs of youth. Methods for gathering and reporting must be developed and adopted statewide.
4. *Future service providers need to be trained on the most up-to-date curricula and assessment methods* that emphasize important life skills, community-based instruction and community resources regarding transition. Preservice and inservice training for current and future service providers must reflect current information and strategies around the issue of transition, the needs of youth with handicaps and their families and advances in technology.
5. A statewide effort should be developed to *increase public awareness on work and living options for persons with disabilities*. Heightening public awareness is needed to increase the full range of adult life opportunities for youth with disabilities.

In viewing the years ahead, carefully guided action is needed by all of Minnesota's educational and community service agencies to assist special education students and their families in addressing questions about the future. This Report suggests that concerted efforts should be undertaken to provide effective transition services. It must be clearly recognized that the transition from school to postsecondary education, training, employment and community living requires (1) sound and effective planning for individuals, (2) support and assistance to students and families both prior to the time of leaving school and at other times of need, (3) comprehensive community planning and interagency cooperation, and (4) statewide planning that supports the development of cooperative partnerships at the local community level. The issue of reforming our services requires the joint efforts of families, the legislature, schools, adult service agencies, employers and citizens. The momentum must continue in the years ahead to improve the transition of students from our public schools.

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## DEFINITIONS

### **Transition:**

The U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) has defined transition programming as an outcome oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment. Transition is a period that includes high school, the point of graduation, additional post-secondary education or adult services, and the initial years in employment. ("Bridges From School To Working Life," Will, 1984). For many of the state planning activities in Minnesota, transition has been further defined as "...a dynamic process whereby a person with disabilities progresses from secondary education to working and living in the community." (Minnesota Interagency Cooperative Agreement, 1987).

### **Special Education:**

300.14 (a)(1)(3) The term "special education" means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parent, to meet the unique needs of a handicapped child. The term also includes vocational education if it consists of specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a handicapped child. (20 U.S.C. 1401 (16))

### **Community Service Agencies:**

Public and private agencies, situated in communities that provide an array of services essential to meet the needs of youth with disabilities during and following the time of leaving school.

### **Interagency Collaboration:**

Coordination among agencies to plan for and provide services to individuals with special needs and their families.

### **Least Restrictive Environment:**

300.550-300.556. (b)(1)(2) (b) Each public agency shall insure: (1) That to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, and (2) that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature of severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (20 U.S.C. 1412(5)(B);1414(a)(1)(C)(iv).

