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With Support from the New York State Education Department,
Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities
TransQUAL Resource Center

Policy Brief

Enhancing Transition for Students with Disabilities Across New York State: State Performance Plan #13 and the New York State Transition Quality Indicators

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Transition Planning and Organizational Change

According to the federal regulations to implement the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), transition services are “designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of a child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation” (IDEA, 2006). For graduating students with disabilities, academic achievement and post-school results have been closely linked.

There are numerous examples of projects that have demonstrated how collaborative planning can improve transition services for students (Asselin, 1995; Blalock, 1996; Chadsey, Leach, & Sheldon, 2001; Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; English, 2002; Everson, 1993; Kohler & Field, 2003; Post, 2004). Perhaps the most instructive was initiated in 1985 in the state of Oregon -- the Community Transition Team Model. At its height, 38 teams of educators, agency personnel, employers, persons with disabilities and family members were trained and funded to engage in five activities: “(1) team building, (2) needs assessment, (3) program planning, (4) program implementation, and (5) program evaluation and repetition of the cycle” (Halpern, Benz, & Lindstrom, 1992, p. 115). This planning process was in place from 1985 until its conclusion in 1998. Reflecting on the decline of this promising practice, Halpern and Benz (2001) developed a list of conditions that would enhance the sustainability of future organizational change initiatives, referred to here as “innovations.”

1. A carefully designed innovation is available that addresses a problem of concern to key state and local stakeholders.
2. Adequate and dependable financial and personnel resources are available to implement the innovation.
3. The innovation is supported by an external structure that legitimizes the efforts of local users and provides them with locally relevant training, technical assistance, and materials throughout implementation.
4. An evolving sense of ownership for the innovation develops, signifying a respect for the values that underlie the innovation and a determination to integrate it into existing programs and the culture that supports these programs.
5. Sufficient time is available for the innovation to pass muster through a rigorous iterative process of implementation, evaluation, and modification that eventually leads to a well-seasoned program with demonstrable and desirable outcomes, incorporated into the existing cultures of the affected agencies. (p. 222)

In other words, collaboration for its own sake is not enough. The outcomes and processes for each of these teams must be clearly defined at the onset, with enough structure, administrative support, and resources to sustain their collective efforts over time.

Regulatory Compliance and State Performance Plan Indicator #13

The State Performance Plan (SPP) requires all states to provide data to the U.S. Department of Education on 20 separate indicators. Two of those indicators, (13 and 14) are directly related to transition planning and services. According to the New York State Education Department, Indicator 13 of the State Performance Plan (SPP 13) “requires the State to annually report the percentage of youth aged 15 and above with IEPs that include coordinated, measurable annual IEP goals and transition services that will reasonably enable the student to meet measurable post-secondary goals” (NYSED, 2006). Over a six-year period, all school districts will be required to evaluate a representative sample of student IEPs, determining if each student’s educational program contains the elements necessary for post-school success. Those school districts found to be out of compliance in one or more areas will undergo a process of corrective action until all issues are resolved.

To fully comprehend SPP 13, school districts must understand how to structure and deliver individualized transition services that *reasonably enable* students to achieve desired post-school activities. Obtaining a job, going to college, and living in the community involve people, agencies, and resources that exist outside of the school system. To effectively ensure that school activities will successfully assist students on their journeys beyond high school, community resource people (e.g., employers, colleges, agency personnel) must be involved in the design and implementation of transition services at some point in this process. These resource people can contribute their experiences and expertise, building more credible transition services.

Transition Continuous Quality Improvement

To assist school districts to develop collaborative relationships and to continuously improve transition services, the New York State Education Department developed 76 Transition Quality Indicators (TQI) (TransQUAL Online, 2006). Based on the “Taxonomy for Transition Programming” (Kohler, 1996), the TQI have been carefully crafted to help school districts determine their current practices and set priorities for collaborative planning of new, improved transition services, and are organized around five major topic areas with related questions:

1. **Educational program structure** (19 indicators) – Does the educational program have the resources and structure to communicate clear guidelines, provide professional development, and encourage creative opportunities for growth of transition and school-to-careers?
2. **Interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration** (13 indicators) – Are educational programs and community agencies aware of each other’s services and engaged with students in collaborative projects to improve transition outcomes?
3. **Family involvement** (8 indicators) – Are families participating in transition planning, community resources, training events, and program development activities related to life after school?

4. **Student involvement** (20 indicators) – Do students actively participate in a process of vocational assessment, IEP development, academic and career planning to achieve desired educational and adult outcomes?
5. **Student development** (16 indicators) – Are course offerings in the areas of academics, life skills, vocational assessment/preparation, and work experience responsive to local conditions and the diversity of your student population?

To further organize and assist with these collaborations, the New York State Education Department and Cornell University’s Employment and Disability Institute have developed the TransQUAL Online website (<http://www.transqual.org>). TransQUAL Online is a password-protected, account-driven website, designed to help school district collaborative planning teams conduct a TQI self-assessment, learn from online resources, and develop related work plans. After a school district team implements their work plan, they can use TransQUAL to measure the results of their efforts through an online impact reporting form. The entire TransQUAL planning process can be accomplished within a few hours, due to the unique design of this website.

Using TransQUAL to Assist with State Performance Plan #13

Within the New York State School District Self-Review Monitoring Protocol, SPP 13 has been broken down into two major categories to assist with the review of individual student IEPs: (1) Transition Service Needs, Measurable Post-secondary Goals and Annual Goals; and (2) Transition Services. Each of these major categories contains a subset of *issues* for compliance as they pertain to each IEP. To provide a road map for school districts engaged in a SPP 13 review, this document provides specific components of IEPs for school districts to look at, such as post-secondary goals and present levels of performance. Specific evidence is listed within each of these components that an IEP must contain to be in compliance with SPP 13. Each piece of evidence is referred to as a “look-for” (NYSED, 2005). The person reviewing the IEP must look-for and find all of these pieces of evidence in order for the IEP to be in compliance with SPP 13.

The look-fors are closely related to the TQI found in TransQUAL Online. For instance, under Transition Services, one of the look-fors reads:

“Courses of study including career and technical education or other career development.” (p. 2)

One of the TQI found in TransQUAL Online reads:

“Students participate in mainstream vocational classes and programs, including Career and Technical Education coursework, the Career Plan and the annual guidance review.”

School districts can use the SPP 13 self-review as a timely reason to pull together a collaborative planning team, initiating a broader discussion of transition services and career development practices. As a school district team is completing the SPP 13 Protocol, they will generate information about their transition and career development practices for individual students and their IEPs. This information can then be used to inform a

school district's collaborative self-study and work plan development using the TransQUAL website. There are three points in the SPP 13 process where TransQUAL Online may be integrated:

1. *During the initial self-review of IEPs.* The school superintendent or designee is to select a team to conduct the self-review. This team is charged with developing timelines and reviewing data. A team should combine people who work for the school district with parents, student leaders, and outside agency personnel. As part of this review, the TransQUAL self-assessment can be used with the team to provide a structure for discussing, for instance, how IEPs are developed to support measurable post-secondary goals.
2. *During development of a corrective action plan.* Once the review team has assessed a sample of their student's IEPs, they must submit a report and plan of corrective action to the New York State Education Department. This plan must include a timetable for corrective action, if necessary. TransQUAL breaks down the corrective action plan into tasks and timelines for individual team members, and provides the team with the space and opportunity to explore professional development and resource needs.
3. *After implementation of the corrective action plan.* Within one year of submitting the Self-Review Monitoring Report, the school district must provide documentation to the New York State Education Department that all issues of non-compliance have been corrected. The TransQUAL progress report provides structure for a thorough assessment of the effectiveness of the team's corrective actions. This is also an opportunity for the team to determine their next steps, answering for themselves: How do we sustain the changes brought about through the corrective action plan? Is there life after SPP 13?

The attached tables detail the links between each look-for and one or more TQI. By infusing SPP 13 data into the TransQUAL collaborative process, a school district will bring this mandated review into a broader context, becoming a springboard toward building transition practices that reasonably enable students to achieve their post-secondary goals.

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SPP 13-to-TQI Table: Transition Service Needs, Post-Secondary Goals and Annual Goals

PER STATE PERFORMANCE PLAN INDICATOR #13, LOOK AT THE IEP FOR EVIDENCE OF:	RELATED TRANSITION QUALITY INDICATORS (TQI) FROM TRANSQUAL ONLINE
Direct student involvement in determining preferences and interests, transition needs and post-secondary goals.	4a1. Students are prepared through curricular activities to participate in transition planning. 4a2. Self-determination (choice-making) is facilitated within the planning process. 4a3. Students are invited to participate in the transition planning process. 4b5. Post-secondary goals and objectives are based on student choices. 4c2. Transition planning and services process begins no later than 15.
Present levels of performance indicate the student's strengths, preferences, and interests.	4c5. There are functional evaluations of academic, social, cognitive, physical, vocational and other abilities. 5e3. Vocational assessment, career plan, and experience portfolios are informative about student skills.
Present levels of performance identify the student's needs relating to transition.	4c1. Planning is based on assessment information including vocational assessment.
Post-secondary goal statements include goals relating to training, education, employment and independent living.	4b7. The coordinated set of activities by age 15 includes instruction, related services, community experiences and preparation for employment and other post-school adult outcomes.
Post-secondary goals are measurable (i.e., observable)	4b3. Beginning at age 15 (and at a younger age, if determined appropriate), transition-related post-secondary goals and objectives are specified in the IEP.
Post-secondary goals are based on age-appropriate assessment information.	5e4. Situational, functional and vocational assessments are used as appropriate.
Annual goals are recommended that would incrementally help the student to achieve his/her post-secondary goals.	4b4. Educational experiences correspond to post-secondary goals and objectives in the areas of employment, post-secondary education, and community living. 5e2. There is continuous assessment of skills in relation to employment options and job requirements.
Goals are not the same on all IEP's but are unique to the individual.	4a4. Transition planning decisions are driven by the student and family. 4c4. A multiethnic and multicultural perspective, free from gender bias, is evident across all planning, guidance, career development and educational experiences.

SPP 13-to-TQ1 Table: Transition Services

PER STATE PERFORMANCE PLAN INDICATOR #13, LOOK AT THE IEP FOR EVIDENCE OF:	RELATED TRANSITION QUALITY INDICATORS (TQI) FROM TRANSQUAL ONLINE
Courses of study including career and technical education or other career development.	5a3. Life skills and the CDOS Learning Standards are infused throughout academic subject areas. 5d1. Students participate in mainstream vocational classes and programs, including Career and Technical Education coursework, the Career Plan and the annual guidance review.
An observable relationship among the present levels of performance, transition needs and post-secondary goals, annual goals, recommended special education programs and the coordinated set of activities recommended for the student.	1b3. Program structure, process and services are clearly articulated (e.g., Transition Services Planning and Implementation Guide, "Steps in the IEP process" page 15-18). 4b4. Educational experiences correspond to post-secondary goals and objectives in the areas of employment, post-secondary education, and community living.
Needed activities identified for each of the six areas (instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment and other post-school living objectives, acquisition of daily living skills, and functional vocational evaluations, when appropriate).	1a1. Integrated placements are made in academic, vocational and work experience programs. Access to all program options is the same as for nondisabled peers. 4b7. The coordinated set of activities by age 15 includes instruction, related services, community experiences and preparation for employment and other post-school adult outcomes. 5a2. Postsecondary educational planning and skills development occurs. 5c2. Instruction is community based.
Clear indication that the participating agency responsible to provide the recommended activity participated in the planning process.	2c1. There is a process to project upcoming student service/program needs. 2d1. There is active participation of agencies with students, families and schools. 4b9. Participating agencies' responsibilities are stated in the IEP.
Coordination between school district activities and those of participating agencies is designed to help the student incrementally work toward attainment of the post-secondary goals.	2a1. Local agency roles regarding transition services are clearly stated. 2d2. Participating agency contacts are made and referrals completed before student exits school. 2e2. Service delivery is coordinated across school-agency systems, resulting in a reduction of barriers. 2e3. New services are developed collaboratively between schools and community.

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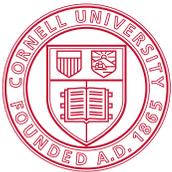
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