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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Making the Transition from School to
Community Living:

*Preparing Handicapped Youth in Maine
for Fully Integrated Lives*

The Final Report to the 112th Maine Legislature

Select Committee to Address Training and Employment Opportunities
for Handicapped Persons Beyond School Age

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Select Committee to Address Training and Employment
Opportunities for Handicapped Youth Beyond School Age

MEMBERS

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Maine Association of Directors
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Maine Committee on Problems
of the Mentally Retarded

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Goodwill of Maine

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on Mental Health

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Governor's Committee on
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Bureau of Vocational Education

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Maine Center for the Blind

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Bureau of Rehabilitation

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Division of Special Education

Pamela Webb Dube, Director
Adult Basic Education
Augusta Adult Education

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Manager, Special Projects
Bureau of Mental Retardation

Nathanael Greene, Member
Maine Advisory Council on
Vocational Education

Dr. Pam Tetley
Superintendent, Governor Baxter
School for the Deaf

Edeltraut Thiele, Member
State Planning Council on
Developmental Disabilities

STAFF

Larry Glantz
Consultant to Select Committee

Dr. Richard Bartlett
Division of Special Education

Joe Lessard
Bureau of Vocational Education

Dean Crocker, Director
Advocates for the Developmentally Disabled

Kathy Powers
Interagency Coordinator

Brenda Harvey
Bureau of Mental Health

Jon Steuerwalt
Bureau of Rehabilitation

Rob Jones
Bureau of Mental Retardation

Peter Stowell, Director
State Planning Council on
Developmental Disabilities

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Making the Transition from School to Community Living: Preparing Handicapped Youth in Maine for Fully Integrated Lives

The Final Report of the Select Committee to Address Training and Employment Opportunities for Handicapped Youth Beyond School Age to the 112th Maine Legislature

Every year approximately 1,000 special education students leave public school in Maine. Some do graduate, although that graduation doesn't necessarily mean that the student is prepared for life as an adult in the community. Many simply reach the age of 20 and are, by law, no longer eligible for special education. These students have continuing needs for education and training and must cross an uncertain gap to obtain needed services from adult service agencies.

In Maine there is currently no overall systematic plan that provides a bridge linking the public school system with the system of adult service agencies. The planning and provision of services to handicapped youth by each system is now done quite independently, often with little or no communication or coordination between the separate systems. The spanning of this gap through cooperative planning and service provision has been the goal of the Select Committee's efforts.

The problem continues to grow, despite a few programs that have demonstrated success. Handicapped youth still leave the school system each year with few or no plans for post-secondary services. These youth have been eased through a school system which is presently geared to produce college-bound and vocationally trained youth and which has not committed adequate resources to improve the employment and community integration prospects of all handicapped youth. The youth who leave our schools each year have unmet and continuing needs for the development of the skills, information, and values that will facilitate their success in the labor market and in the community. The major problems which affect Maine's, and the nation's, special education graduates are:

- lack of early and consistent career planning and vocational preparation;
- low expectations and awareness of how to meet needs for early career and life skills planning, both by students and society;
- lack of adequate coordination between education and adult service programs; and
- inadequate opportunities for suitable employment.

To address these problems will require parents, educators and service providers to re-examine long held assumptions about what is appropriate for handicapped students. It will require dissolving the boundaries that now characterize our social service system based on categorical funding. And, most importantly, it will mean adapting existing employment and training programs to accommodate larger numbers of handicapped young adults.

The Select Committee to Address Training and Employment Opportunities for Handicapped Youth Beyond School Age has thoroughly examined this issue during its eighteen-month existence, and its members agree that the complexity of the problem allows no quick and easy solutions. The Committee is keenly aware of the difficulty in obtaining the necessary financial resources and political support to allow an immediate full-scale assault on the problems regarding transitional services to handicapped youth. At the same time, it is also aware of the need to proceed with this type of reform in a cautious manner. Our educational system is primarily locally planned and administered with wide variations in local needs and educational approaches and, thus, careful study is needed to identify common denominator solutions regarding transitional services.

Therefore, the final report outlines the Committee's response to its initial charge to identify both short and long range recommendations for change. A "one-year" plan is offered, outlining immediate steps that can be taken to coordinate existing services in a way that will provide immediate transitional services while examination of this issue area continues. Secondly, a "five-year" plan is offered to move toward the creation of a new policy environment that will eliminate planning and service gaps between the school and adult service systems for handicapped youth.

The Committee is in agreement that efforts to address this problem are long overdue. Significant federal and state action is due NOW. Therefore, some elements within the proposed one-year plan have been translated into proposed legislation and introduced into the Maine Legislature. We urge the legislature to give this bill serious consideration during this year, regardless of the tardiness of its introduction or the press of other problems in the state.

Any approach to the current problem, including the short and long range plans submitted with the final report, will require the infusion of significant financial support from the state. This report is released at a time when the prospects for obtaining such resources are slim. Nevertheless, these services must be provided whatever the cost. The financial cost of lost potential and segregation of handicapped youth from the community following exit from school cannot be measured. Costs which can be measured include a lifetime of reliance upon public assistance, on lost tax revenue and long-term caretaking services. The Select Committee calls on the Maine State Legislature to make an investment in the lives of the 1000 youth who leave special education programs each year with limited potential for rich, full lives in the community.

The One-Year Plan: A Proposal for Immediate Transitional Services

The immediate steps which the Select Committee has proposed in its "one-year" plan seek to do something immediately to meet the needs of youth in transition, while still allowing further study to determine the best long range policy solutions. The Committee cannot merely call for more study of the issues while observing the major problems which handicapped youth and their families face. At the same time the Committee hopes that opting for this disciplined approach will make the best possible use of the limited financial resources while working toward the best long range solutions.

The primary objective of the one-year plan is to create six local sites which will propose and coordinate transitional services for handicapped young adults. The model structure which these transition service sites would follow has already worked very successfully in testing alternative service approaches for youth at the opposite end of school age entitlement, preschool children under the age of 5 years. All existing services agencies - school age and adult, public and private, school and community - would work together locally to plan innovative approaches that coordinate services.

In order to submit an application for a pilot project, a local coordinating committee must be formed by representatives of the local school district, parents, service consumers, community agencies, and all other state and local organizations and groups which currently serve handicapped youth in transition from school to community. Once approved to operate a pilot project, operating funds will be provided to one of the agencies of institutions participating on the local committee, including the local school administrative office or another community agency. Upon the receipt of project funds, each local committee will appoint a local coordinator to implement the project plan.

Projects would be located in locales with varying levels of existing services, economic activity, community services, and so forth. An intensive and on-going evaluation of the coordination sites will seek to determine the type of services that work best in each area. These findings will be used in later efforts to replicate the coordination projects in new areas and to address state policy revisions that eliminate gaps in services between the school and the community.

Also outlined in the one-year plan are recommendations for specific state agency actions which can and should be implemented immediately to improve the planning and provision of necessary services for handicapped youth in transition. Many of these represent relatively minor changes in present services provided by the Division of Special Education and the three major adult service bureaus (Rehabilitation, Mental Health, and Mental Retardation). Others, which seek to provide immediate relief where major gaps exist between school and community services, are to be coordinated by the Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee which is established in the proposed legislation.

The Five-Year Plan: Long Term Goals for Eliminating the Gap in Services between School and the Community.

The five-year plan seeks to define a long-term route or direction for the on-going revision of state and local programs and policy related to transitional services for handicapped youth. Each of these recommendations must be addressed to facilitate necessary transitional services. However, it is also understood that these recommendations will be able to be fine-tuned as more knowledge is gained through operation of the local transition coordinating projects.

The five-year recommendations are presented in four sections:

- A. Personnel Preparation and Training
- B. High School Programming
- C. Transition from School to Community Living
- D. Post-High School Employment and Training

Conclusion

Action is needed now to curtail the pain, the financial cost, and the lost potential which results from inadequate transitional service planning between schools, adult service agencies, and community organizations. The Select Committee has defined a detailed plan for improving the chances of success of the handicapped youth who progress through the school system into the community adult service system. This plan outlines actions for both immediate and long-term systemic change which would meet the needs of these youth.

The membership of the Select Committee is unanimous in its support for the proposed legislation submitted to the legislature and has pledged to work tirelessly for its passage.

**Select Committee to Address Training and Employment
Opportunities for Handicapped Youth Beyond School Age**

**I. Summary of Select Committee Recommendations for
Immediate Transitional Services for Handicapped Youth**

A. Legislative Proposals

1. Appoint an Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee for Handicapped Youth in Transition to oversee further policy analysis and development regarding transition services in Maine.
2. Create local coordination projects at six locations in the state to test local initiatives which provide transitional services through cooperation between school and adult service providers.
3. Create a local Transitional Services Coordinator position to centralize statewide coordination of on-going studies of transition needs and local implementation of innovative services.
4. Structure the active involvement of all major adult service providers in the Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee and the local coordination projects.
5. Provide financial resources for each of the three major adult service bureaus to increase the level of transitional services in each of the local coordination project areas, either through the purchase of necessary services or the creation of new caseworker positions.

B. State Agency Policy Development

1. Design and implement a system for tracking all special education students for up to three years after leaving school for any reason. This system should:
 - a. Be implemented through cooperative working agreements with state adult service agencies that can assist in the collection and analysis of data in the tracking effort;
 - b. Allow each state agency to review and comment upon the proposed data collection and tracking system; and
 - c. Allow access to data by local schools, other adult and youth education agencies, and adult service agencies to assist in the design of programs that better suit the needs of handicapped students and adults.
2. Create a network and directory which identifies for each adult service agency a contact person in every part of the state, with such contact person having the responsibility to either represent the agency, or name a suitable substitute, at every appropriate Pupil Evaluation Team (PET) meeting.
3. Develop and implement a cooperative agreement between each state education and adult service agency for which such an agreement does not currently exist, for the specific purpose of coordinating interagency communication and cooperation regarding the planning and providing of transitional services.

4. Develop a major new systematic plan for expanded statewide vocational education programs in Maine, in cooperation with all other adult service agencies, which achieves the following:
 - a. Clearly sets out data on the needs and cost of providing Vocational Education programs to handicapped youth in Maine;
 - b. Places a major emphasis on the funding of pre-vocational assessment services, teacher training and preparation, vocational evaluation services, and outreach efforts to handicapped youth not currently receiving vocational education services;
 - c. Outlines the programmatic and fiscal commitments of each participating adult service agency; and
 - d. Outlines the need for additional funding which could be sought from the Legislature and from the federal government through the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act.
5. Study the state-wide needs at the local level for non-credentialed service providers, and identify and examine barriers to include methods of establishing reimbursement for these individuals, licensing requirement, and other certification criteria.

C. Direct Transitional Services for Handicapped Youth

1. Require a transitional service planning meeting involving the schools and all relevant adult service agencies for each special education student who leaves school.
2. Require that Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) address the following transitional services:
 - a. Vocational evaluation needs and plans;
 - b. Employment and career objectives, including interim employment plans during the pupil's term in school;
 - c. Career exploration opportunities and recommendations; and
 - d. Measurable performance objectives for the student and the service providers within the educational system.
3. Require that the Pupil Evaluation Team (PET) meeting process include the following procedures:
 - a. Recommendations for the involvement of state and local community agencies in the services identified in the IEP;
 - b. Recommendations for services to be provided by state and local agencies outside of the IEP/PET process; and

- c. A recommendation for a lead state agency to be responsible for transitional planning and case management, or, if no such agency can be easily identified, a recommendation for arbitration by the Interdepartmental Committee that would determine a suitable lead agency; and
 - d. Recommendations for post-secondary training/support services.
4. Require regional and local service staff to participate in Pupil Evaluation Team planning activities, and especially in post-exit Transitional planning meetings, for handicapped youth who are within the jurisdiction of agency services.
 5. Adopt regulations for the development of an Individualized Training Plan (ITP) following agency staff participation in any Pupil Evaluation Team planning meeting, outlining long- and short-term plans and commitments regarding agency services in conjunction with other services in conjunction with other services outlined in a student's IEP.
 6. Continue present levels of development of new vocational education program and funding for secondary vocational programs, including the development of community based satellite programs jointly funded with other agencies such as the Jobs Training Partnership Act and the Bureau of Rehabilitation.
 7. Assure, within the local coordinating pilot projects, an adequate and appropriate range of post-secondary training and employment options for handicapped young adults receiving services, including practical/fundamental life activities, independent living skills training, pre-vocational training, sheltered and supported employment, and post-secondary vocational training.
 8. Hold the Bureau of Vocational Education responsible for building linkages between the vocational education, vocational services provided by adult service-providers, and the business community, including the development of work and training slots, cooperative education opportunities, and other opportunities in competitive, supported and sheltered employment.

II. Summary of Select Committee Recommendations for
Long Term Transitional Services for Handicapped Youth

A. Personnel Preparation and Training

1. Revise University of Maine pre-service curriculum for all special education teachers to include preparation in pre-vocational and vocational programming for handicapped young adults.
2. Revise the certification process for all special education teachers, including teachers of learning disabled and behavioral disordered children, and consider adopting separate certification standards for grades K-8 and 9-12.
3. Revise the curriculum at the University of Maine graduate program in education, counseling and public policy to include more preparation in work with handicapped adults.
4. Plan and deliver coordinated in-service training to teachers and other professionals on vocational programming for handicapped young adults.
5. Amend certification standards for vocational education instructors to include courses in teaching handicapped students.
6. Revise the certification standards for regular classroom teachers to include 6 hours of special education course work.
7. Do a study of the availability and capacity of programs for the preparation of special education and related services personnel, to determine if a sufficient number and kinds of personnel will become available to meet future service needs for handicapped youth in transition.

B. High School Programming

1. Require local school districts to develop special education and vocational education plans that include a description of how the program plans to assess and program for independent life skills needs by grade 7 or age 12, whichever comes first, and vocational assessment and training needs by grade 9 or age 14, whichever comes first.
2. Continue to provide technical assistance to local school districts in needs and methods of providing transitional planning and preparation services to handicapped students, including model curricula and materials covering life and work skills.
3. Establish guidelines for local development of a Life and Work Skills curriculum, which also includes a mechanism for including in that development input from local groups including employers. Technical assistance for local educational units that wish to implement such a curriculum should be provided.

4. Develop and fund, as part of the new comprehensive statewide plan for vocational educational services, new initiatives for appropriate secondary vocational programs and support services, including the development of community based satellite programs jointly funded with other agencies such as the Jobs Training Partnership Act and the Bureau of Rehabilitation.

C. Transition From School To Community Living

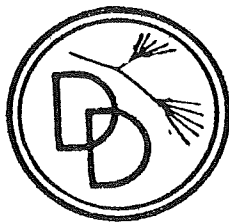
1. Complete the establishment of a school-to-community transitional services planning process which includes the following elements:
 - a. Pre-exit PET meeting two years prior to a handicapped student leaving school due to graduation or attainment of age 20;
 - b. Exit PET meeting at the time that any student leaves school, including those who exit "voluntarily" or for temporary disabling illnesses;
 - c. Outline in a student's IEP all-school provided transitional preparation services;
 - d. Procedures for the identification of a "lead" adult service agency to take primary responsibility for case management and provision of direct services; and
 - e. Adult service agency participation in PET meetings, and the development of Individual Transition Plans which outline specific agency services to be provided.
2. Maintain a strong role for the Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee for Handicapped Youth in Transition in the oversight of the statewide transitional services planning process, including:
 - a. Intervention where necessary to settle agency jurisdictional questions, including situations where the lead adult agency is not participating in the transitional services planning process.
 - b. On-going data collection and analysis concerning the operation of the transitional planning process, and providing an annual report on this data to all involved agencies and the public.

D. Post-High School Employment and Training

1. Establish a state-funded supported employment program for handicapped adults.
2. Assure an adequate and appropriate range of post-secondary training and employment options for all handicapped young adults, including:
 - a. Practical/Fundamental Life Activities;
 - b. Independent Living Skills Training;
 - c. Pre-vocational Training;
 - d. Competitive, Supported and Sheltered Employment Options; and
 - e. Post-secondary Vocational Training.

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3. Promote the availability and accessibility of adult education for handicapped adults through increased subsidy for these services.
4. Allow the Select Committee to Address Training and Employment Opportunities for Handicapped Youth Beyond School Age to meet periodically to advise the Interdepartmental Coordinating Committee.
5. Develop, in consultation with other agencies, a package of wage and tax incentives to encourage employers to hire handicapped young adults.
6. Educate SSI recipients, parents, and service providers about work incentive provision of SSI program.



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