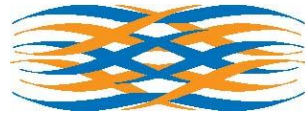


INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Organisation: NSW Parents' Council

Date received: 26/08/2011



NSW PARENTS' COUNCIL

25 August 2011

The Director,
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2,
Parliament House,
Macquarie Street,
Sydney NSW 2000.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Transitional Support for Students with Additional or Complex Needs (Inquiry)

Please find attached a submission to the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 to the provision Transitional Support for Students with Additional or Complex Needs (Inquiry) from the NSW Parents' Council Inc for the Committee's consideration.

We formally request that we be given an opportunity to talk to this submission at the public hearings.

For any additional information, please contact the author.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Crabb
Executive Officer
The NSW Parents' Council Inc

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Submission

Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues

Transitional Support for Students with Additional or Complex Needs August 2011

The NSW Parents' Council Inc. (the "*Council*") is the peak body representing parents of children who are educated in non-government schools in NSW. The Council was founded in 1962 and has, for almost half a century, represented the concerns of parents to State and Federal Ministers of Education and participated in numerous reference committees relating to curriculum development and student wellbeing.

Our supporting principles are:

- Children are entitled to an education which will enable them to attain their full potential.
- Parents have the primary responsibility to educate their children. They are the first and foremost educators of their children, and the family is the first educative 'school' or 'community' to which children belong.
- "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children" (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, clause 3, article 26).
- As a result of the importance of the school in a child's education, parents have the right and duty to choose schools which they consider best suit their children's schooling requirements.
- Parents are entitled to exercise their right of choice of schooling for their children without financial or other disability being imposed on them or on their children by any Government.
- Schools exist to help parents discharge their educational responsibilities, and there should be harmony between the philosophy and values of the home and those of the school.
- Governments, as protectors of the rights of citizens, should assist and encourage, not restrict, parents' exercise of their right to choose schools which they consider best suit their children's needs.
- As a result of their fundamental obligation to protect and promote the rights of all citizens, Governments have responsibilities in relation to schooling for all children, not just for those attending government schools.
- The child, not the school, should be the focus for the allocation of public funds for schooling.
- A Basic Funding Entitlement, calculated as a percentage of the total per capita recurrent cost of schooling in government schools, is a real implementation of the parents' right of choice of school and the right of every child to an equitable share of public funds for schooling.
- For students who are experiencing specified educational disadvantages, their schooling costs should be assessed and more public funds made available, in addition to their Basic Funding Entitlement.
- Governments should acknowledge and support the valuable role of the family in society, and parents in the learning partnerships with schools.

The NSW Parents' Council's submission has been developed in response to the enquiry into the adequacy and accessibility of transitional support for students with additional or complex needs. The submission has been developed for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Social Issues.

The issues outlined address the support mechanisms currently in place for students progressing through the different stages of their education, as well as the support offered to their families.

The paper addresses issues around the transition from secondary school to employment, further education, and other post-school options including;

1. The adequacy and accessibility of appropriate support for children and their families;
2. Best practice approaches to ensure seamless and streamlined assistance during transitions; and,
3. Any other related matters.

The adequacy and accessibility of appropriate support for children and their families

Transitioning to adulthood is a challenge for many young people with additional needs, and it is particularly a challenge when a young person has even more complex needs.

Young people with disabilities may face certain challenges in the lifelong process of making decisions about their own lives and moving into adulthood. It is important that young people be provided with the support needed that allows them to live life in the most inclusive community setting with meaningful life outcomes.

A 'systematic' approach to transition services means developing strategies to address the complex needs of young with disabilities in an organised and coordinated manner to support multiple pathways to successful transition.

Such an approach requires that schools reach out beyond their boundaries and seek a shared responsibility from the many agencies that provide services for students in transition. In reality, this does not currently occur and many families and young people with disabilities are not provided with the adequate supports and information required.

A young person with a disability and his or her family must make some important decisions about the future. Such decisions include making choices around future living arrangements, education and employment, finances, and community and social involvement. These are often complex issues that benefit from proper planning.

This includes all areas of transition to adulthood including:

- ☐ Adult services;
- ☐ Education;
- ☐ Employment programs and opportunities;
- ☐ Living arrangements;
- ☐ Community life;
- ☐ Financial independence;
- ☐ Relationships (making friends);
- ☐ Social/Leisure; and
- ☐ Health care and medical management.

Areas Elements to be considered in transition planning

Cultural Considerations

- ☐ Specific needs and desires
- ☐ Activities and groups
- ☐ Other considerations

Education, Training

- ☐ Post-secondary education or training options
- ☐ Need for educational supports
- ☐ Need for financial support for education/training

Employment or Career Development

- ☐ Work experiences
- ☐ Employment interests
- ☐ Employable skills
- ☐ Need for supportive employment
- ☐ Volunteer experiences, opportunities and interests

Guardianship, Trusteeship and Personal Directives

- ☐ Guardianship status: partial, full or independent
- ☐ Trustee status: formal, informal or independent
- ☐ Personal directive in place
- ☐ Self-advocacy
- ☐ Wills/trusts
- ☐ Other legal considerations

Health Status and Care

- ☐ Technological and adaptive equipment
- ☐ Health supports, equipment and supplies to maintain health
- ☐ Psychosocial and cognitive development supports
- ☐ Medical services and resources

Areas Elements to be considered

Income and Finances

- ☐ Banking
- ☐ Long-term financial plan
- ☐ Life insurance
- ☐ Income sources
- ☐ Funding currently available or expected to be available
- ☐ Supports required to manage finances

Living Arrangements

- ☐ Whether to continue with current living arrangement
- ☐ Examination of types of housing
- ☐ Semi-independent or independent living
- ☐ Short-term and long-term plan for housing
- ☐ Rent or own

Personal Management

- ☐ Household management including meal preparation
- ☐ Hygiene/personal care
- ☐ Sexuality and birth control
- ☐ Social skills
- ☐ Money management

Service Requirements

- ☐ Services and supports currently used, needed and anticipated for adulthood
- ☐ Services currently accessed that the youth will no longer be eligible for as an adult
- ☐ Eligibility for adult services
- ☐ Awareness of information requirements and length of process involved in some areas of transition into adult services
- ☐ Resources

Social, Recreational and Spiritual Development

- ☐ Hobbies and interests
- ☐ Pets
- ☐ Sports and fitness activities
- ☐ Religious and other spiritual groups
- ☐ Volunteer activities and interests

Transportation

- ☐ Independent (bus, walk, cycle, etc;)
- ☐ Assisted (parents or family)
- ☐ Specialised accessible transport
- ☐ Equipment needs

Transition planning ideally should be a partnership involving the individual with special needs, their family, local service providers, school staff and government staff who support the young person transitioning to adulthood. Transition planning is an interactive, dynamic process that requires a number of meetings to prepare, plan and implement a successful transition for a young person with special needs.

Carefully thought out transition planning can assist the young person in securing employment, pursuing post-secondary education and experiencing a meaningful community life.

The Importance of Early and Person Centred Planning

It is critical that the transition planning process begins as early as possible and in some cases the young person may be as young as 14 years of age. Starting early allows time to adequately prepare and implement a transition plan that will address the challenges of preparing for adulthood. In many cases families are not provided with adequate information about the range of services, supports and options available. This is particularly difficult for families who face cultural barriers and have limited English skills.

Best practice indicates that the key to a successful transition planning process is an approach known as person-centered planning. Person-centered planning is a concept that places the individual with special needs in a leadership role during the transition planning and service delivery process. It is also consistent with the principles of self-determination and individual involvement as the young person then makes choices around planning for his or her future.

Involving the young person is fundamental to the planning process, and is considered to be best practice. When a young person is involved with the process and has choices around his or her future, that individual's service planning and outcomes are enhanced.

It is essential that there be active participation of the young person, and their family and friends in the planning process. Through active participation, a young person is further encouraged to be 'in the driver's seat'.

Active participation also ensures that the planning goals and strategies are based on the aspirations, desires and needs of the individual and his or her family – not merely on the services and supports that are available.

The Need for Mandatory IEP's

In other countries Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are mandated, such as in the United States. In Australia, IEP's are not currently mandated and many young people with a disability or special needs do not currently have IEP's in place.

IEP's are an essential component of transition planning and many cases IEPs can be used as the basis for transition plans. IEPs are key in matching a student's educational programs and experiences to their post-school goals.

Recognition of Family and Parental Involvement

It is critical that parental involvement be considered. Family is the one solid continuum in a child's life. Family can be a key to the success in transition. In many cases, parents and members of an extended family are the only consistent relationships a young person has through his or her life. Family involvement in identifying the young person's strengths, creating a plan for the future, and advocating on his or her behalf is essential.

The extent and nature of involvement will vary depending on the capacity of the family, their unique abilities and availability. Parents bring to the process a fundamental understanding of their son or daughter, insight into what their child may want to accomplish, and experience navigating service systems on behalf of their child. Perhaps most importantly, parents can also share their child's dream and help them realise their vision.

Support Services and Networks

Involving community members in the transition planning process works toward building crucial service and support networks for the youth and his or her family. Community involvement facilitates a smooth transition for a young person with additional or complex needs from school to adulthood.

Transition planning should be a collaborative responsibility of the young person, family, the government, community service organisations, and relevant community partners.

However, successful transition planning moves beyond the notion of involving only service providers, to include those in the business and post-secondary education communities. Involving these community members serves to establish community connections and creates vocational and volunteer opportunities for the young person. Key community participants include educators, current and future service providers, and representatives from education, vocational rehabilitation programs, employment services and community businesses.

A collaborative, multi-faceted and coordinated transition process is required. A plan needs to be in place that addresses areas of employment, post-secondary education, health care services, independent living and/or community living.

The Need for a Transition Co-ordinator

It is important that a transition coordinator be appointed. The identification and use of a transition coordinator is viewed as best practice. There are many examples listed in the latter part of this document under best practice, in terms of how a transition co-ordinator can assist.

This role can be assumed by a variety of individuals including the young person transitioning to adulthood, the parent or guardian, another family member or a school-based employee. If the plan

is not school-based, the young person and his or her family may choose a transition coordinator from the planning team. If the young person is attending school, a school-based employee typically assumes the role of the coordinator of the IEP/Transition Plan.

Examples of people who could be involved in the transition planning include;

- ☐ Friends and other members of the young person's informal network
- ☐ Elders
- ☐ School personnel and tutors
- ☐ Cultural groups
- ☐ Social workers
- ☐ Community members (church, neighbours, coaches, and mentors etc.)
- ☐ Community-based service providers
- ☐ Service agency representatives
- ☐ Post-secondary educators
- ☐ Business and vocational providers
- ☐ Other people who can contribute to the plan

As mentioned, the young person or a family member may choose to take on this role. This person will coordinate the transition planning process.

Assistive technology

Making the school curriculum accessible to all students with additional needs is a priority. One strategy being adopted with increasing success is the implementation of assistive technologies to support students with special needs.

Assistive technology (AT) is also known as adaptive technology. However, assistive technology has become the more widely used term for the broad range of supports available to assist people with various cognitive, sensory, physical, communication, learning, and other challenges that limit participation and learning opportunities.

Assistive technology is a system or support that allows a person with a disability to work around his/her area of challenge. Assistive technology can help the young person to accomplish a task more independently. Well-matched assistive technologies provide solutions for people who experience barriers to learning. Parents cannot always afford to purchase assistive technology and many schools struggle with inadequate funding for children with additional needs.

Difficulties with Current Transition Support

Some of the difficulties with current transition support for young people include the following;

- In NSW there is a complex service system which can create confusion for individuals and families (for example, families often struggle to find out about services specific to their child's needs).
- There is often a lack of information and understanding among parents/families/schools about services and supports (for example, families and school staff are often misinformed or lack the information).
- Transition planning is often too late and needs to start as early as 13 years of age (for example, in some incidences young people do not have transition plans or services in place when leaving school).
- There is a lack of system-wide integration and co-ordination which does not lead to a seamless progression from youth to adulthood (For example, a family often has a number of services involved and no central/streamlined case management).
- Young people who are home schooled or fall outside the education system do not always have access to transition planning and support (for example, young people home schooled often do not have a referral to services such as ADHC).

- Many student with additional needs do not receive support in school, particularly if attending a mainstream or independent school (For example, some young people are not necessarily identified as having additional needs due to the lack of funding and supports).
- Minimal transition planning occurring in some situations and inconsistency (For example, some schools are excellent and there is a staff member responsible for transition support. In some schools there can be no specific staff member appointed and responsible for transition support).
- There is a lack of age appropriate supports for young people in transition (For example, in rural and regional areas there are limited services and supports for young people with disabilities).
- Different definitions of disability across the service system (For example, some disability employment services are very flexible and include learning difficulties, mental health etc. There are some providers who are less flexible, particularly job service providers who will not work with young people who are school aged).
- Assistive Technology is often not affordable or accessible for students with additional needs.
- Some funding systems, which are perceived as inflexible (For example, in the various school sectors funding varies for a child with a disability. In the Catholic and Independent sector, there is limited funding in high school to cater for young people with additional needs).
- Services, which are perceived as driven by funding rather than by needs (For example, some educational institutions such as TAFE, provide great programs for young people with disabilities such as social skills programs for young people with Aspergers. Other institutions are reluctant to provide for young people with additional needs such as group training and registered training organisations. These organisations are often driven by funding rather than need).
- Many factors may affect young people with a disabilities participation in employment, for example, difficulty in obtaining open employment opportunities; lack of training in skills needed to succeed in the work environment; lack of employer awareness of the needs of people with disabilities or willingness to accommodate those needs in the workplace (For example, young people with disabilities are still very under-represented in employment and post school education).
- Lack of culturally sensitive services and supports for families from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) families (For example, many parents from CALD backgrounds are not aware of services due to language barriers. Access to interpreters and translated materials can be a barrier).

Best practice approaches to ensure seamless and streamlined assistance during transitions;

The following is an overview of international best practice in regards to transition planning and support.

Example 1: TEENS+ and LIFE+

<http://www.teensplus.org.uk/>

TEENS+ is a 4 year transitional education programme for young people aged 17-24 with complex additional support needs and severe communication problems, who have left school.

The programme comprises an extension of the students' previous education, with emphasis on the transition to a more independent life in the community. The program is based at the Inch Community Centre, Edinburgh providing an inclusive community environment. It comprises of 4 different elements: learning; communication; life skills; and sports.

Stage two of the project, LIFE+, is an education and training programme for people with complex additional support needs and severe communication problems. The project offers the opportunity to try work placements and continue life long learning.

LIFE+ builds upon the students' previous education and skills, with an emphasis on training in employability skills, such as: building relationships; negotiation skills; communication skills and time management skills. LIFE+ will continue the students' lifelong learning and all students will participate in the work module - working in a support environment.

Example 2: Illinois Best Practice Program

http://www.disability.illinois.edu/files/best_practices_files/textonly/document1.html

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has provided comprehensive transitional and educational support services for students with disabilities for nearly six decades. The intent of these supports has always been to optimise the postsecondary educational participation, rate of graduation, and employment of persons with severe disabilities.

The program, which currently serves approximately 1,000 students annually, provides individualised training to help students improve their ability to independently manage their disability-related needs.

Example 3: Alberta Transition Planning and Protocol

<http://www.seniors.alberta.ca/disabilitysupports/documents/TransitionPlanningProtocol.pdf>

The ***Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Disabilities*** was developed under the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative (ACYI), with input from stakeholders throughout the province. The ACYI is a collaborative partnership of government ministries working on issues affecting children and youth. Established in 1998, its vision is to ensure that Alberta's children and youth are well cared for, safe, successful at learning, and healthy.

Example 4: The Ontario Schools Model

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/transiti/6.pdf>

The experience of the Ontario school system and the policies and practices in place is an excellent model.

Example 5: Partnership Matters

<http://north.learningnetworks.org.uk/show.php?id=1107>

Partnership Matters is a guidance document, produced by the Scottish Government, which describes the roles and responsibilities of all agencies supporting people with additional support needs who wish to study, or are currently studying at Scotland's colleges or universities. This includes agencies providing personal care, health care, transport or other forms of support. First published in 2005, a revised version of the guidance was published in 2010, which for the first time extended the guidance to universities.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning have both endorsed Partnership Matters and are keen for all the relevant agencies to work together in partnership to improve the transition process for students with additional support needs.

Example 6: British Columbia Support Guide

http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/pdf/support_guide.pdf

A support guide has been produced by the government to guide best practice.

The NSW Parents' Council request an opportunity to present their evidence to the NSW Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues at their inquiry.

The NSW Parents' Council thank the excellent input from our parent in the preparation of this submission, in particular, Sharon Grocott for her excellent research and composition.