



# New York **Makes Work Pay**

Developing a path to employment for New Yorkers with disabilities

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## **Evidence from the New York State Program on Transition to Adulthood for Youth with Disabilities: Comparative Analysis with National Data**

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## Executive Summary

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Focusing on transition to adulthood outcomes is central to improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities by ensuring their early labor market engagement. Access to effective transition planning is pivotal to the successful transition of youth with disabilities to work and live in their communities as adults. Key ingredients of a successful transition program for youth with disabilities is a blended approach to planning that includes individualized educational planning, career development, work experiences in secondary school, and interagency partnerships/collaborations.

The New York State Education Department awarded 60 Model Transition Programs (MTP) in 2007 to school districts throughout the New York State (NYS) to improve post-secondary education outcomes (i.e., participation in employment, post-secondary education, and connection with the state vocational rehabilitation system) for students with disabilities. The four overarching principles of the MTP were to:

1. Increase the quality of transition programming in secondary schools by adopting leading practices;
2. Strengthen partnerships between the New York State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) system and high schools;
3. Increase participation of youth in employment, VR-related services, and post-secondary education, and
4. Develop partnerships between the schools and community service partners, including colleges/universities and businesses.

Over the course of the statewide initiative, Cornell University's Employment and Disability Institute conducted an evaluation of the MTP demonstration using multi-level data collection strategies informing success at the program and individual levels. The evaluation efforts provided supporting evidence for the success of the MTP's overarching principles leading to improved postsecondary outcomes for youth with disabilities in NYS. However, the results were limited by the fact that the analyses of the MTP were not compared to the benchmarks representing practice as usual.

To learn more about barriers and facilitators experienced by transition-aged youth with disabilities in NYS, the New York Makes Work Pay initiative<sup>1</sup> commissioned a follow-up study to explore the relative impact of the MTP by comparing the program and administrative data collected across the projects in NYS with data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2) or the National Sample (NS).

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<sup>1</sup>The New York Makes Work Pay initiative is a Comprehensive Employment Systems Medicaid Infrastructure Grant from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services to the NYS Office of Mental Health and their management partners, Cornell University's Employment and Disability Institute and the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University to remove obstacles to work and develop pathways to greater economic self-sufficiency for New Yorkers with Disabilities.

Some of the key findings from the national comparative study showed that:

- Students in the NYS program were more likely to participate in career development activities, had better transition planning evident by higher likelihood of employment and postsecondary education-related goals in their Individualized Education Plans, and were more likely to receive services from the partner provider agencies when compared to the students in the NS.
- Students in the NYS program were approximately twice as likely to be successfully engaged in postsecondary work-related activities compared to their counterparts in the NS.

Empirical models demonstrated that different elements of a transition program (i.e., individualized educational planning, career development services, work during secondary school, and services received from partner providers) collectively contributed to the success of the NYS students in comparison to the NS students.

The analytical models indicate that future transition programs in NYS should focus on developing comprehensive models that have an equal emphasis on student career development, individualized education planning, in-school work experiences, paid work during secondary school, higher family involvement in student transition planning, and collaboration with community-based partner provider agencies, including Vocational Rehabilitation. Using a logic model framework, transition programs can achieve the required level of focus necessary for critical programming elements that contribute to successful outcomes for youth with disabilities. Engaging school leadership in program planning and implementation through strategic outreach is a key strategy towards high quality implementation of transition programs.

## **Problem Statement: Transitioning Youth with Disabilities from School to Work**

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Education and employment are the cornerstones of success in American society. Expectations to pursue a good paying job permeate the lives of young people as they move between secondary education and adult life. This period poses particular challenges for youth with disabilities. Above and beyond the enduring demands of functioning as an adult, youth with disabilities must acquire adaptive skills necessary to actively engage in work and/or education for greater societal integration and relationship development (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002). Like their non-disabled peers, youth with disabilities hold the same dreams to live, learn, and earn in their communities upon their exit from high school. However, adult success in these areas is dependent on the individual's ability to obtain and retain a stable source of income through employment. The fringe benefits associated with employment (e.g., access to affordable health insurance, paid vacation time, paid sick leave days, etc.) contribute substantially to an overall quality of life. Public entitlements can often pose a substantial barrier to achievement of successful

work outcomes. Reliance on both cash and health benefits, to provide for basic needs and a stable economic safety net, and the complexity of negotiating the return to work process under these programs is difficult at best, causing some individuals to make decisions to not work or work substantially under their ability level as to not compromise this financial support. Paid employment contributes to increased self-advocacy, self-determination, and citizenship for people with disabilities in general (Benz, Lindstrom & Yovanoff, 2000). Thus, increasing employment outcomes for youth with disabilities is central to students' successful transition to adulthood, building upon their social capital for effective community functioning.

Data from the last two decades shows a discouraging trend with respect to postsecondary outcomes for youth with disabilities when compared to their peers with no disabling conditions. In the recent National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2) of youth with disabilities who had been out of high school one to four years, 58 percent worked full time at their current or most recent job, compared to 66 percent of similarly aged youth in the general population. In the same study, a little less than one quarter of youth with disabilities were enrolled in postsecondary education compared to 41% of the general population (Newman et al., 2009). Although the trends of overall community engagement (i.e., engagement in work, education, or preparation for work) for youth with disabilities remained similar across the two versions of the decade-long National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) studies, there were some notable improvements: (a) an increase in the percentage of young people engaged in both employment and postsecondary education (6% in NLTS and 22% in NLTS2); and (b) an increase in the percentage of young people with paid employment as their only mode of engagement (34% in NLTS and 44% in NLTS2). However, gaps persist when comparing outcomes of these young people and their peers without disabilities.

The recently enacted Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (H.R. 1350 [IDEA 2004]) emphasizes student participation in school-to-work study programs (or career development activities) and Individualized Educational Plans (IEP) to develop an outcomes-oriented focus in transition planning. Informed by a growing body of literature in transition programming, IDEA also emphasized the inclusion of family members, students, and members of the community within the IEP development team towards an outcome's focus (Newman, 2005). One key partner consistently identified across the literature for improving employment and related community engagement for students with disabilities is the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency (Benz, Lindstrom, & Latta, 1999; Will, 1983).

The IDEA of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments (Rehabilitation Act) of 1992 adopted parallel transition-to-adulthood related language to encourage and emphasize the importance of school and VR collaboration to achieve employment and community engagement outcomes for youth with disabilities. The Rehabilitation Act especially addressed the collaboration between VR and school by requiring the VR agency: (a) to coordinate service provision with the state education agency through the establishment of formal interagency agreements [section 101(a)(11)(d)]; (b) to utilize the information submitted

by education agency personnel to determine eligibility of students with disabilities for rehabilitation services and to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) [Section 102(a)(4)]; (c) to determine eligibility of referred students before they exit their high school program and coordinate with the state education agency to provide transition-related services for youth with disabilities [34 CFR 361.22]; and (d) to work with institutions of higher education to support post-secondary education-related services for youth with disabilities [Section 101(a)(11)(d)(iv)].

Despite favorable policy provisions within VR and Special Education, financial support offered by the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration to state VR agencies, and the collaboration between schools and VR has been traditionally limited to making youth referrals for services (The Study Group, 2007). Barriers to school/VR collaboration include a lack of understanding of shared roles in transition planning for youth with disabilities and a low level of support from school administrators to further collaborative transition planning. Additional barriers in school-VR partnerships include limited financial and human resources within VR to support transition-related needs for youth, especially for those who are in high school during their referral process.

The transition process is further complicated by the lack of evidence-based practices leading to better post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities. A recent systematic review of transition research conducted between 1984 and March of 2009 (Test et al., 2009) found that out of 162 articles from an electronic search, 63 warranted further scrutiny. Out of these 63 articles, 22 were included in the final review. This review yielded 16 predictor variables associated with improved post-school outcomes in the areas of education, employment, and/or community living. Out of these 16, four predictor variables indicated moderate levels of correlation with employment outcomes:

- Inclusion in general education
- Paid employment/work experience
- Vocational education
- Work study

The remaining 12 predictors were not as strongly correlated with employment post-school outcomes due to factors such as size of the group studied or the number of studies available:

- Career awareness
- Program of study
- Community experiences
- Self-advocacy/self-determination
- Exit exam requirements/high school diploma
- Self-care/independent living
- Interagency collaboration
- Social skills

- Occupational courses
- Student support
- Parental involvement
- Transition program

Test and colleagues (2009) concluded that "...as students and families engage in the IEP planning process, the predictors can help students achieve their stated post-school goals." (p. 179) Overall, the implication of this and previous research and public policy points to systemic solutions, linking transition and career development to educational reform and community workforce development. In essence, desired post-school outcomes of students across all disability groups can be met through the implementation of sustainable transition programs and services.

## **New York State Model Transition Program**

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In 2007, the Vocational Rehabilitation agency of the New York State Education Department awarded grants to 60 Local Education Agencies (LEA) under the title, Model Transition Program (MTP). Smaller school districts were allowed to group themselves as one MTP entity within their proposals resulting in approximately 150 school districts and an untold number of partnering agencies represented within the 60 funded MTPs.

Applicants were required to demonstrate: (a) use of leading practices in transition to adulthood; (b) establishment of collaborative service delivery networks with community-based service providers; and (c) collaboration with the local VR district offices to ensure high referral quality for students during the two years prior to exit from secondary school. Despite these specifications, based on the examination of funded proposals it was apparent that the funding decisions were not based only on these criteria. This led to a broad range of awarded MTP projects where some proposed a detailed process, while others had no specified program structure. Cornell University's Employment and Disability Institute (EDI) was under contract to conduct formative and summative evaluation of all the 60 MTP programs. EDI's evaluation approach was guided by a logic model framework that guided studying critical components specified in the Request for Proposal. Additional data was collected to understand the unique models across these funded sites. In order to understand the process of program implementation and provide the information on student progress towards transition to adulthood outcomes, EDI researchers adopted a multi-level approach (i.e., program-level and student-level) to the data collection and analysis.

The key sources of data for the MTP evaluation include: (a) Transition Impact Data (TID) online – a password-protected, web-based, individualized student progress tracking system, capturing information on student program participation, services received, transition planning, and referral to VR; and (b) the Case Management System (CaMS) data base – a NYS VR administrative dataset consisting of information on consumer characteristics, services provided/authorized, and VR status indicating consumers' progress towards their em-

ployment goals. Though MTP evaluation utilized additional sources of information, these two data sets primarily served as quantitative data for summative and formative evaluation of the program. The following are some highlights of the MTP evaluation study.

## Student Participation in the MTP Activities

**Career Development Activities:** 80% of MTP students (n=11,688) participated in at least one type of career development activity. Out of those,

- 72% participated in career assessment or career counseling,
- 43% participated in prevocational training,
- 53% participated in job search activities, and
- 14% engaged in internship or apprenticeship with the assistance of MTP resources.

**Postsecondary Education:** 34% (n=4,995) of MTP students participated in activities related to postsecondary education such as taking an introductory course, visits to college settings, and mentoring from college students.

**Employment:** 33% (n=4,841) of MTP students had work experiences at school facilities or in the community while they were a part of the program. Out of those, 36% (n=1,729) were in paid positions.

**VR Outcomes** More than 6,000 youth with disabilities were referred to the state VR program since the inception of the MTP project. Nearly one in five MTP students that were referred to VR had a successful closure and was competitively employed within one year of their secondary school exit. By the end of the MTP project, most of the students already had established an IPE and were working towards their employment goals. The VR counselors viewed MTP students as being better prepared for the world of work and regarded the student motivation levels as key to their success.

## Program-level Factors from Higher Performing MTPs

There were 21 middle and higher performing MTP schools that participated in extensive interviews to discover key practices that may contribute to their success. The list of key practices are listed below.

**Career Development Activities:** A greater percentage of high performing MTPs indicated that they developed new career development activities using the MTP funding compared to the medium performing MTPs who were more likely to continue the career development activities that existed prior to the MTP.

**Parent/Family Involvement:** A greater percentage of high performing MTP sites were successful in engaging parents and family members in the students' transition compared to medium performing sites. Also, the student outcomes were higher among those with higher parental involvement.

**Support Services:** A greater percentage of high performing MTP sites included support services (e.g., positive behavior support, sign language interpreter services in the workplace, etc.) to enhancing their functioning.

**Agency Collaboration:** The high performing MTP sites were more likely to have a higher level of satisfaction with MTP partner provider services. High satisfaction with MTP partner provider services is correlated with higher student outcomes.

These results provided crucial information informing policy and practices for transition to adulthood in NYS. The lack of a comparison sample for the MTP evaluation posed a significant limitation in the scope and strength of analysis and recommendations. However, while designing the data collection systems, the study variables in the TID data set were aligned with the variables in the NLTS2 dataset. Consequently, the MTP evaluation data from NYS were quantitatively compared with the NS data set in this analysis. Besides comparing the NYS data to national benchmarks, the evaluation efforts focused on empirically examining the collective contributions of the various components of the transition program. These components include individualized education planning, participation in career development activities, paid work during secondary school, unpaid work experiences in secondary school, and receipt of services from partner providers – contributing to the overall outcomes for youth with disabilities. The latter has several policy implications that advocate for an equal emphasis on the components of transition to adulthood programs contributing to successful outcomes and developing a comprehensive approach.

## Research Aims and Methods

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The specific aim of this analysis was: (a) to compare the postsecondary outcomes of students who participated in the MTP project and those who participated in the NLTS2; (b) to study associations between secondary school experiences and postsecondary outcomes for both cohorts; and (c) to study the mediating roles of the secondary school experiences in the patterns of postsecondary outcomes for both cohorts.

## Research Data Sets

The two key sources of data for this study include the NYS MTP and the NLTS2.

**NYS MTP data.** This data set consisted of merged data from the TID online system and the CaMS. The TID is a web-based data collection tool online at <https://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/tid2>, and was designed to catalogue quarterly information on progress indicators for students participating in the MTP project. These indicators were developed based on a review of existing literature and in line with the previously stated goals of the MTP project. In addition to collecting information on student demographics, TID collected information on secondary school experiences that were central to the MTP project goals (e.g., participation in career development activities, transition planning, work experiences, services received from collaborating agencies, etc). The TID data was entered and updated for each student on a quarterly basis by the student's transition coordinator at the MTP school districts. In

addition to serving as a repository of data for program evaluation analysis, the TID system generated systematic reports for each site to facilitate their program improvement and implementation efforts.

The CaMS data set consisted of consumer characteristic information, VR case status, information on services received, employment-related information, and closure status for referred consumers (MTP students). In the MTP project, students received most of their services while in secondary school and following their secondary school exit, the VR system continued to serve their postsecondary needs in securing a job through a variety of employment training, rehabilitative services, and others. No follow-up data was collected on students following their secondary school exit due to the nature and scope of the evaluation. The CaMS data system served as a reasonable source of information on postsecondary employment-related engagement for MTP participants. Almost all the 11th and 12th graders and some in 10th grade were referred to VR for services.

The NYS cohort consisted of students who exited from the MTP program and had a matching record within the CaMS data set. A total of 4,788 MTP students exited the MTP project and among them, 4,063 had matching records in the CaMS data set with an 85% match rate. The remaining 725 exited students did not have matching records in the CaMS data set because most were not referred to VR since the students and/or parents declined VR services. These two groups did not differ significantly on their demographic or other school-based experiences. Therefore, the NYS cohort consisted of data on secondary school experiences and their postsecondary VR engagement one year post-exit, reported as of October 2009.

**The NLTS2 data set.** The NLTS2, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), is a 10 year longitudinal follow-up study (2000-2010) collecting information on secondary school and postsecondary experiences for 12,000 youth with disabilities receiving special education services who were 13-16 years old in December of 2000-2001 (Wagner et al., 2003). The information in NLTS2 is collected through multiple sources: (a) Parent/youth telephone interviews; (b) Direct assessments; and (c) School data collection. The survey is representative of special education students from secondary schools in the U.S. Its main purpose is to provide data on transition experiences for youth and young adults with disabilities. In addition to describing secondary school experiences and outcomes, the NLTS2 also follows up with these youth and young adults two to five years post exit from secondary school. The survey instruments are fielded in several waves across the 10 year data collection period. In summary, the NLTS2 has five waves of parental interview data, four waves of youth interview data, two waves each of direct student assessment, school program survey, teacher survey, and student transcript analyses. All waves of data collection occurred sequentially through the 10 year period. Currently the NLTS2 has completed data collection for all waves of parental and youth interviews.

In order to replicate the same data structure as the NYS cohort, data from Wave 1 exiters were merged to their postsecondary information in Wave 2. Similarly, data from Wave 2 exiters were merged to their postsecondary information in Waves 3. Key variables of secondary school experiences aligning with the TID data elements were selected in the final data set leading to 2,343 NS youth and young adults.

## Matched Data Sets

The two data sets, NS and NYS, were concatenated to generate the merged data set for this study. Variables were re-coded across both data sets for purposes of comparability.

**Key school-based experience variables.** Secondary school experiences were treated as predictor or independent variables (in addition to demographic variables) while studying their association with the postsecondary work-related engagement outcomes. Key secondary school experience variables included student participation in career development activities,<sup>2</sup> in-school unpaid work experiences, and paid work experiences during secondary school. Transition planning-related IEP goals and services received from partnering community-based service providers were also included as secondary school experience variables for both of the cohorts.

**Outcome variables.** As the information on postsecondary outcomes for NYS and NS students were collected one year post exit, it is likely that many students were still engaged in employment-related training programs with VR and other community-based organizations while some had postsecondary employment. Realizing that many youth with disabilities take a few years after high school to be in a regular full-time job, a composite outcome variable was constructed to capture these different modes of engagement informing their successful transition to work. As a result, students having a paid job as well as those receiving training to secure employment after their secondary school exit, were considered to have positive postsecondary employment-related engagement compared to those who had neither postsecondary employment nor were engaged in some type of training leading to employment. In the NYS cohort this information was available based on various VR status related information obtained from the CaMS data set. NYS youth with VR statuses 10, 14, 18, 20, 22, and 26 were considered to have a positive postsecondary employment-related engagement (see appendix for explanation of VR statuses).

## Results

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### Descriptive Analysis

Both the NYS and NS cohorts had a higher percentage of males compared to females and both had a higher percentage of Caucasian students. The NS had a higher percentage of Hispanic/Latino students compared to the NYS cohort (15% and 6% respectively). Also, most of the NYS sample consisted of 11th and 12th grade or older students, while most students in the NS were 10th or 11th grade or younger students. The NS cohort consisted of a higher percentage of students with developmental disabilities and sensory disabilities, while the NYS cohort consisted of a higher percentage of students with learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, and multiple disabilities. Furthermore, 20% of NS students received SSI where only 8% of the NYS students indicated they received SSI during their exit year.

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<sup>2</sup> Career development activities included career awareness and counseling, pre-vocational training, specific job-skills or technical training, job shadowing and internship.

Secondary school experiences also varied substantially across the two cohorts. NYS students were twice as likely to be participating in career development activities compared to the NS students (82% and 42% respectively). A greater percentage of NYS students participated in trainings related to specific jobs and internships compared to their counterparts in the NS. A higher percentage of NYS students had postsecondary work and education-related goals on their IEP, and were more likely to have received services from partner provider agencies compared to the NS. However, the NS students were more likely to have in-school unpaid and paid work experiences during secondary school compared to the NYS students.

## Making Sense of the Data

The propensity score analysis method was used to initially balance the differences in demographic composition between the two cohorts.<sup>3</sup> Afterwards, analysis was conducted to examine the differences in secondary school experiences and its relationship with postsecondary work-related engagement outcomes across the two cohorts.

Substantial differences existed in secondary school experiences between the NYS and NS cohorts. NYS students were 11 times more likely to participate in career development activities in secondary school compared to the NS after controlling for the propensity scores. Likewise, the NYS students were 11 times more likely to have an employment goal in their IEP, nearly 7 times more likely to have a postsecondary education goal in their IEP, and 3.3 times more likely to have received services from partner agencies compared to their peers in the NS after controlling for the propensity scores. The NYS students were 2.5 times less likely to have participated in in-school work and 3.3 times less likely to have paid work experience in secondary school compared to the NS students.

**Table 1. Examining the differences in secondary school experiences between the NYS sample and NS**

Secondary School Experiences	Odds Ratios (OR) for NYS vs. NS	95% CI	P-value
Participation in career development activities	11.2	9.4-13.3	<0.001
Participation in in-school work	0.4	0.4-0.5	<0.001
Having paid work experience in secondary school	0.3	0.2-0.3	<0.001
Having employment-related goals in IEP	11.3	9.6-13.0	<0.001
Having postsecondary education-related goals in IEP	6.7	5.8-7.8	<0.001
Received services from partner agencies	3.3	2.9-3.8	<0.001

<sup>3</sup> Propensity score analysis is a statistical technique to ensure individuals across the study and comparison groups are similar based on the observed demographic variables.

Further investigation the relationship between participation in the NYS program, secondary school experience variables, and postsecondary work-related engagement outcomes, and while controlling for the propensity score variable in a multiple regression analysis model, the following results were observed:

Students participating in the NYS transition program were approximately two times more likely (OR = 2.1; 95% CI:1.8 to 2.5) to be engaged in work-related postsecondary activities compared to the NS of students from the NLTS2 after controlling for baseline differences in demographic characteristics between the two groups and their secondary school experiences.

Students who participated in paid work in secondary school were nearly two times (OR = 1.7; 95% CI: 1.4 to 2.1) more likely to be engaged in work-related postsecondary activities compared to their counterparts. Likewise, those who had IEP goals for postsecondary education were 1.3 times more likely (30%) to be engaged in work-related postsecondary activities, while those who received services from partner agencies were 1.1 times more likely (10%).

**Table 2. Summary of logistic regression analysis exploring relationship between the postsecondary work engagement outcomes and secondary school experiences for the NYS and NS cohorts**

Independent Variables	Odds Ratio	95% CI	P-value
NYS vs. NS	2.1	1.8-2.5	<0.001
Participation in career development activities vs. no participation	1.1	1.0-1.3	0.2
Participation in in-school work vs. no participation	1.0	0.8-1.2	0.7
Having paid work experience in secondary school vs. no paid work experience	1.7	1.4-2.1	<0.001
Having employment-related goals in IEP vs. none	0.8	0.7-0.9	<0.01
Having postsecondary education-related goals in IEP vs. none	1.3	1.1-1.4	<0.001
Received services from partner agencies vs. none	1.1	1.0-1.3	0.04

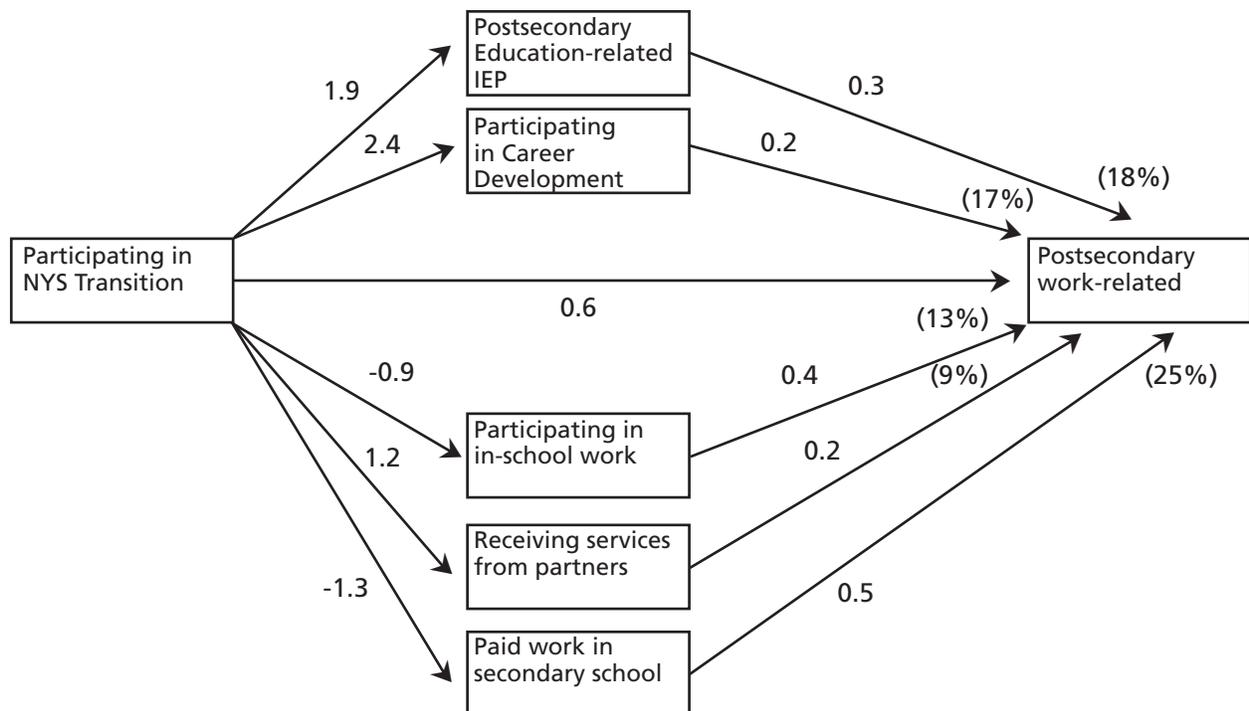
Though this analysis helped to estimate the impact of participation in the NYS MTP compared to the NS, it was not clear which mechanisms increased postsecondary outcomes realized by the NYS cohort. It is important to note that paid work in secondary school had a large effect size estimate (OR = 1.7). It was evident that the NYS students were less likely

to participate in paid work compared to the NS students. Despite this negative finding, the NYS students continued to demonstrate success in postsecondary employment outcomes compared to the NS. It is likely that the increased positive postsecondary work outcomes for the NYS students are driven by the fact that they were more often to receive services from partner providers and have postsecondary education goals in their IEP compared to the NS students. This indicates a future need to study how each of the secondary school experience variables mediated the overall effect of participating in the NYS MTP versus the NS. This can be achieved statistically by conducting a mediation analysis.

Figure 1 illustrates independent meditational analysis results. It can be observed that 25% of the effect of participating in the NYS cohort and postsecondary work-related outcome is explained by participation in paid work experience. Similarly, 18%, 17%, 13%, and 9% of the relationship was explained by having postsecondary education-related IEP goals, participation in career development activities, participation in in-school work experiences, and services received by partner agencies respectively. It can be noted from previous analysis that the NYS students were more likely to participate in career development activities, have postsecondary education-related goals in IEP, participate in in-school work, and receive services from partner agencies.

Although a lesser percentage of NYS students had paid work experiences in secondary school, the effects were offset by a higher likelihood of other secondary school experience variables. The meditational analysis emphasizes the necessity and contributions of different program components in transition to adulthood for youth with disabilities.

**Figure 1. Meditational Analysis**



## Reflections

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It was observed that the students in the NYS cohort were more engaged in postsecondary work-related commitments compared to their peers in the NS cohort. Additionally, the effects of their successful outcomes were mediated by a set of secondary school experiences – mainly participation in career development activities, having postsecondary education goals in IEP, and receiving services from partner agencies. Though paid employment in secondary school and in-school work experiences were substantial mediators, in the context of this analysis this path did not drive the overall outcome for the NYS cohort, as many students were not engaged in these activities. The latter variables were significant predictors of postsecondary outcomes in multiple regression models.

This analysis indicates that even though paid employment and in-school work continue to remain significant drivers of postsecondary outcomes, other key components of transition programming such as participation in career development activities, individualized education planning, and services from partner providers continue to contribute to successful transition outcomes. By highlighting the contribution of each element of transition programs in postsecondary outcomes, the analysis emphasizes on the fact that these elements are of equal, if not more, importance and these continue to remain as critical ingredients of a successful transition program.

The MTP was guided by an increased emphasis on adopting leading practices in the areas of career development, transition planning, and required a formal collaboration of schools with community-based partner provider agency services. Though these evaluation efforts did not collect information on program fidelity to these required elements, a follow-up specialized study – the Transition Services Model Study – examined some of the quality aspects of these elements in high performing sites. With the new funding support, it was evident that the high performing sites were able to develop new career development activities that were in line with the career goals for youth with disabilities. Additionally, their collaboration with community-based partner provider agencies helped the sites enhance the portfolio of career-based learning opportunities, while their collaboration with VR served in providing them feedback on the young person's level of preparation to transition into the world of work. The administrative support for improved transition services in school systems provided creative ways of leveraging resources, developing new activities, and fostering key alliances in high performing sites. Also, the higher performing sites were more likely to actively engage students and their parents in transition planning and were more likely to include specific postsecondary goals in the student's IEP document. Furthermore, the IEP document included within the referral packet to VR helped in the earlier establishment of an IPE when these youths exited secondary school. Though comparable information is not available for the NS, the findings from the mediation analysis and the Transition Services Model study helps in understanding the critical ingredients of a successful transition program.

## Recommendations

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Transition to adulthood is a process involving multiple stakeholders, (e.g., youth with disabilities, parents/families, educators, employers, rehabilitation professionals, etc.) planning and working collaboratively with an outcomes focus for employment and community-inclusion of youth with disabilities. Findings from the analysis have implications for all of the following stakeholders.

### Youth

- Participate in their individualized education planning process with an emphasis on establishing goals in the areas of employment and postsecondary education;
- Continue to focus on participating in career development activities, in-school and out-of-school work that are closely in line with their career aspirations.

### Parents, Families and Employers

- Participate in the process of transition to adulthood by providing feedback on the various strategies adopted to improve employability as well as the likelihood of attending postsecondary education for youth with disabilities;
- Advocate for a comprehensive approach to transition programming that has equal emphasis on all the elements (i.e. individualize education planning, career development services, in-school and out-of-school work opportunities, and services from community-based partner providers).

### Educators and Transition Program Professionals

- Emphasize a comprehensive approach for transition programs;
- Support from school leadership in implementation of transition to adulthood programs;
- Engage in a collaborative data-based decision making approach of transition to adulthood programs;
- Continue to encourage and foster collaboration with community-based providers of rehabilitation services to improve opportunities for young people to work;
- Build relationships with institutions of postsecondary education for providing exposure to higher education for youth with disabilities;
- Educate young people on issues related to benefits planning and focus on skills necessary for functioning as an adult in their communities.

### Rehabilitation Service Provider Agencies

- Participate in the process of transition by working with schools and school districts to refining strategies that improve employability and quality of education programs for youth with disabilities;

- Perform a targeted outreach to the families and parent networks to explain the types and array of services offered within their institutions;
- Develop relationships with educational institutions for establishing a seamless referral process for services;
- Participate in transition to adulthood systems improvement initiatives as stakeholders dealing with the supply-side of the employment equation.

## **Policymakers**

- Require an integrated approach to transition programming by schools and school districts that involves an equal emphasis on the inclusion of leading practices related to: individualized planning, career development activities, in-school and out-of-school work experiences, and strategic outcome-oriented collaboration with community-based providers of rehabilitation services;
- Require that transition programs continue to include school leadership in the process of program development, implementation, and program refinement ensuring institutional commitment to full community inclusion of transitioning youth with disabilities;
- Require that transition programs develop and operate using a simple logic model framework with evaluation check-points informing on student participation, student outcomes and program quality.

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## Appendix – Definitions of VR Status

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### VR Case Status Review

- 00 Indicates that an application has been received, but not processed.
- 02 Applicant status. Individual has attended a group orientation session and signed an application for VR services. In some cases, as with school aged students, this status occurs when VR receives a Transmittal Referral Form with a student signature. This is followed by an initial interview with the student, family, and school staff to obtain further information.
- 07 Eligibility Extension. Not enough information to determine eligibility. On extended applicant status.
- 08 Case is closed *prior to* an eligibility decision. This may happen when the student is not interested or not available for services for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the student is found *ineligible* for VR services; this is the exception to the process.
- 10 Applicant is eligible for VR services. This decision is made by a team of VR counselors within a federally mandated 60-day time frame. The determination results from a review of the application and related materials. The information reviewed for this purpose is gathered during the referral and application process and the more VR can rely on existing records, the easier it is to facilitate this decision in a timely manner. If more information is determined necessary to facilitate the decision, the consumer will be contacted to review and negotiate. The eligibility decision is provided in writing to the consumer.
- 12 Plan Development. During this time, the VR counselor is reviewing existing vocational and educational information with the consumer and identifying potential vocational goal areas or needs. VR or another source can fund services identified at this time (i.e. vocational assessment).
- 14 Vocational counseling and guidance is offered to consumers throughout the process. When a case is specifically found in this status, it is the *primary* service being provided to the consumer.
- 16 Physical Restoration is provided to individuals requiring such things as a vehicle, home, or medical restoration.
- 18 Training can include, but is not limited to, support in college level training, vocational skills training, on-the-job training, and supported employment.
- 20 This status is used to identify the population of consumers who are “ready for employment”. In other words, the consumer has completed all job readiness and preparation and this is the time when a placement plan is developed. Services needed to assist the consumer in getting a job might include referral to the Workforce Development Center, registration with the Department of Labor job bank, resume development, interview practice, direct job placement efforts, etc.

- 22 Consumer is employed. This status takes effect on the first day of employment and continues for a 90 day period. During this time, the VR counselor is ensuring the consumer that the employment is satisfactory and continues uninterrupted. Sometimes the concerns that occur at this time can be resolved very easily and result in uninterrupted employment.
- 24 This status is available for interrupted services (i.e. when barriers or concerns interfere with the consumer meeting his/her vocational goal). This status can be used for up to six months to assist with clarification and resolution of issues. These issues are often disability specific but may also be related to personal or financial circumstances. If the barriers are unable to be resolved, the case may move to closure.
- 26 This status is called a number of things such as *successful closure, successful Rehabilitation, and successful outcome*. It is measured at 90 days after the start of a new job and is the most important measurement used to evaluate the success of the VR program and staff.
- 28 The case is closed after the initiation of a vocational plan (IPE) but *prior to* a successful status 26 outcome. This type of situation can occur at any time from status 12 to status 24, for reasons such as exacerbation of disability, relocation out-of-state, or other personal reasons.
- 30 The case is closed after the determination of eligibility but *prior to* the development of a vocational plan (IPE). This may occur as a result of an exacerbation of disability, relocation out-of-state, or other personal reasons.

## NOTES

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[www.NYMakesWorkPay.org](http://www.NYMakesWorkPay.org)

#### **Contact Information**

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607.255.2891 (tty)  
607.255.2763 (fax)  
ilr\_edi@cornell.edu  
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#### **Partnering Organizations**

New York State Office Of Mental Health  
Employment and Disability Institute (Cornell University)  
Burton Blatt Institute (Syracuse University)

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