



# FOCUS on Results

Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services

**October 2007****Accountability****Assessment****Curriculum & Instruction****Dispute Resolution****Early Childhood****IEPs & IFSPs****Personnel****State & Federal Policy****Transition****Other**

**This *FOCUS on Results* document** represents the collaborative efforts of the Michigan Transition Services Association (MTSA) and the Michigan Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP). This is the first in a series of articles designed to emphasize the need for a cultural shift in perception and practice about what efforts are needed for each student to achieve post-school success.

The following information provides a basic historical backdrop of education that leads us to the current state and national high school reform policies that will facilitate a change in practices for transitioning students with disabilities to post-school and community success.

To help each student achieve post-school success in light of more rigorous requirements of the new *Michigan Merit Curriculum*, a shift in focus toward relevant instruction and supportive relationships is essential. Along with rigorous curriculum requirements, students now need instruction that is relevant to their post-school dreams. They also need education-based relationships that support student strengths and encourage dreams, visions, and pathways leading toward post-school success.

## Preparing Students for Success: A Cultural Shift From Where We've Been to Where We're Going

Michigan Transition Services Association (MTSA) and Michigan Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP) Collaborative Work Group

The past two decades have seen many positive developments in education policy for students with disabilities. Before setting a course of action based on recent policy changes, it is important to take a look back at the evolution of education policy in order to better understand the reform efforts and cultural "transitions" that lay ahead for education stakeholders.

This article will explore a series of historical events in education that have helped bring students with disabilities out of segregated settings and into the general curriculum. This historical shift has led to a focus on outcomes, which defines our current practice.

### From There to Here

The following historical perspective is reprinted in part with permission from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult

Education. The full document, *From There to Here: The Road to Reform of American High Schools*, can be accessed at [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/hs/04summit/history.doc](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/hs/04summit/history.doc).

As teachers, principals, and local and state leaders work to implement provisions of the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act 2001, *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) 2004, and the *Michigan Merit Curriculum*, it is worth reflecting on how the American high school system has evolved, the assumptions upon which it rests, and the serious policy debates that should inform its future. The current American high school education system is based on a model established when the expectations of secondary education were far different from today's. The original model assumed that most students would not go on to postsecondary education or training and that the majority had little need for rigorous academic preparation.



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## In the Beginning: Preparing the Elite

Until the 20th Century, secondary education was a small-scale experience, largely reserved for the privileged. Even as late as 1910, only about 10 percent of American youth attended high school. The first American high school—the Boston Latin Grammar School—was founded in 1635 to prepare young men for college at Harvard or service in the government or the church. Although elementary education spread rapidly among the American population in succeeding generations, high school education did not. The first public high school did not appear until the English Classical School opened in Boston in 1821, nearly 200 years later. By 1870, there were still only 500 public high schools in the United States, but things were changing. During this era, enrollment first opened to girls, the modern public high school was born, and large cities began to expand the construction of high schools in response to the mass urbanization of the Industrial Revolution (Boyer, 1983).

While college preparatory schools still existed, “manual” (i.e. vocational) training schools began to multiply. Students enrolling in the new high schools of the late 19th Century were not necessarily being prepared for college. Many parents and students saw the “new vocationalism” as a shortcut to the skilled jobs readily available in the growing factories and agricultural enterprises. Academic subjects came to be regarded as merely a part of, rather than the core of, the curriculum of the manual training schools.

## The Great Divide

By the end of the 19th Century, some education leaders were becoming distressed by the uneven quality of high school education. In response, the National Council of Education was convened in 1892. The council, also known as the Committee of Ten, mapped a core of academic subjects that they considered necessary to prepare students for college. In addition to Latin, Greek, and mathematics, the committee

added modern subjects that, in altered form, are still considered the core of today’s academic curriculum: English, foreign languages, natural history, physical science, geography, history, civil government, and political economy (Boyer, 1983).

The Committee of Ten believed that this curriculum was suitable for the entire high school population, including those in manual schools and those not intending to go on to further education or training. To the objection—one still heard today—that this curriculum was not suitable preparation for life and work, they countered that a liberal arts education, which trained the mind, was suitable for all students regardless of their future life path. Their message was simple: “there would be no distinction between those students preparing for college and those who were preparing for life” (Kliebard, 1986).

This view did not prevail for long. In the first two decades of the 20th Century, wave after wave of new immigrants, many of them poor and with little formal education, arrived in the United States and into its growing high schools. Education and industry leaders assumed that most students would go on to work in unskilled or semi-skilled work after high school and that the greatest need was for students to be acculturated into American society.

In 1918, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, appointed by the National Education Association, issued *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*. These principles stated that the primary purposes of high schools were health, citizenship, and worthy home membership, and, only secondarily, command of fundamental processes (Kliebard, 1986). Published by the U.S. Bureau of Education, this document helped lay the foundation for the modern American high school, with its emphasis on providing custodial care, which later came to be known as “life adjustment” education. The enactment of the first federal vocational education legislation in 1917, along with the Cardinal Principles vision, dominated most

schools. So-called "general" studies—neither specifically college nor technical preparation—began to push out the academic and career/technical disciplines (Boyer, 1983). Rigorous academic studies suffered most, as they were reserved for the small minority of students deemed "college material." College preparatory schools persisted only for the elite.

## **New Urgency Amid Old Expectations**

It was a shock to the public in the 1950s and 1960s when the United States found itself falling behind other countries in academic skills, symbolized by the Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik in 1957 (Rutherford, 2006). The state of academics in American curriculum—particularly math and science—was suddenly decried by the American public. Policymakers and educators responded by adding more courses and ever-larger facilities with all the modern trappings—science labs, football fields, and band rooms. However, their concern was still for the elite, defined by educators as the top 20 percent of students, who would become the scientists and engineers who would win the Cold War (Kliebard, 1986).

What the policy-makers did not do was re-examine assumptions about the capabilities of most young Americans. Schools continued to believe that students should be sorted into tracks—academic, vocational, or general—depending on their test scores and, more often, the judgment of school personnel. Most students were judged not to be "college material" and, thus, did not need rigorous academic preparation. A lack of overall academic progress became increasingly apparent to business leaders, policymakers, and educators as the economy faced new challenges from Europe and Asia during the 1980s. In 1983, Secretary of Education Terrell Bell appointed the national Commission on Excellence in Education to address the issue. The commission's report, *A Nation at Risk*, marked the first time a government-sponsored report prompted serious discussion and action to implement higher academic standards for all

students (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). It echoed the sentiment of the Committee of Ten, renewing the demand that American schools provide all students with access to a rigorous academic curriculum. But progress since 1983 has been slow and uneven. After decades of reform, only 60 percent of high school students, including occupational/technical education students, now complete the number of academic credits recommended by the commission as necessary for postsecondary education and training (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2003).

Today's world demands a higher level of academic achievement. Establishing high expectations for each student is a critical first step. Students and their parents have made choices about the direction they wish to pursue—70 percent of high school graduates indicate that they intend to pursue some sort of postsecondary education at some point in their lives [U.S. Department of Education, National Education Longitudinal Study (NCES), 1996]. But too few are offered, or guided to, the types of courses that will prepare them for their chosen future. The vision of excellence recommended by the commission 20 years ago continues to be an elusive goal for the nation and its education system. Too many students are still ill-served by low expectations and lax curricula. Additionally, the big question still remains: What mix of instructional, curricular, and organizational strategies are appropriate to achieve the needed results for all students?

Transforming the American high school will require a consistent and committed partnership of parents, students, teachers, principals, and leaders at the local, state, and national level to create educational opportunities that will produce the results worthy of American youth in the 21st Century.

## **Equity and Access**

It wasn't until the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s that significant efforts were made

***The term 'Transition Services' means a coordinated set of activities that focuses on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child...to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.***

**-IDEA 2004**



The Center for Educational Networking (CEN) is a statewide education information network that produces and disseminates publications and documents related to the education of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).



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## Statement of Compliance with Federal Law

The Michigan Department of Education complies with all Federal laws and regulations prohibiting discrimination and with all requirements and regulations of the U.S. Department of Education.

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What Title IX is: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is the landmark federal law that bans sex discrimination in schools, whether it is in curricular, extra-curricular or athletic activities.

Title IX states: "No person in the U.S. shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal aid."

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is in compliance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as amended, 20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq. (Title IX), and its implementing regulation, at 34 C.F.R. Part 106, which prohibits discrimination based on sex. The MDE, as a recipient of federal financial assistance from the United States Department of Education (USDOE), is subject to the provisions of Title IX. MDE does not discriminate based on gender in employment or in any educational program or activity that it operates.

The designated individual at the Michigan Department of Education for inquiries and complaints regarding Title IX is:

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to ensure that all students had equal access to public education. In the 1960s, advocates sought a federal role in providing leadership and funding efforts for a free and appropriate public education, or FAPE, to children with disabilities. Congress took a step toward this in 1966 when it established the Bureau for Education of the Handicapped under Title VI of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*. Subsequently, a number of initiatives earmarked small amounts of federal funds for serving children with disabilities. It was these programs that were later codified under a single law, the *Education of the Handicapped Act (PL 91-230)* in 1970. Two important actions—the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka (1954)*, (Boyer, 1983), ending legal segregation, and the *Education for all Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142)* of 1975, mandating full educational opportunities for all children with disabilities—cemented the foundation for the system that is still developing today.

## A Brief History of Special Education

### The Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975

In 1975, Congress enacted the *Education for all Handicapped Children Act* with the intent that children with disabilities would have the same opportunity as other children to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). Additionally, it established that all eligible children would:

- Receive special education and related services at no cost.
- Have an individualized education program (IEP).
- Receive educational services in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

While this proved to be a monumental triumph for many students, implementation of the law and the full realization of the intent of the law lagged behind the promise of equal access. The term "transition" was introduced by

Madeline Will in 1983 as an educational reform to help students in special education be better prepared for the movement from school to employment settings (Brolin, 1992). Beginning in 1985, significant research and demonstration activities were initiated to improve the transition of youth with disabilities from school to work, postsecondary education, and community living (Leach & Harmon, 1993).

However, with no mandate for these promising practices and activities, implementation was inconsistent. According to Leach & Harmon's November 2000 report:

Despite efforts throughout the 1980s to expand school-to-work transition services for youth with disabilities, the results of post-school follow-up studies suggested that students with disabilities had a very difficult time adjusting to life after graduation from high school.

- During their final years in school, these youth remained dependent on IEP teams to make decisions, assess performance, and make linkages with service agencies (Chadsky-Rusch, Rusch & O'Reilly, 1991).
- Rarely were they taught, required, or invited to advocate their own interests (Mithaug, Martin, Agran & Rusch, 1988).
- The unemployment, under-education, and continued substantial dependence on parents; social isolation; and lack of involvement in community-oriented activities characteristic of many individuals with disabilities, are factors that foster continued dependence among youth in transition.

## The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* of 1990 (PL 101-476) mandated transition services for the first time and defined them as:



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A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation (PL 101-476, 20 U.S.C., 1401 [a][19]).

The act required that these services:

- (1) Be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests; and
- (2) Include (i) instruction, (ii) community experiences, (iii) the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and (iv) appropriate acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

IDEA 1990 reached beyond equal access and required specific planning that would lead to positive post-school outcomes for youth. Still, outcomes for students with disabilities continued to be less than ideal. In 1993, SRI International began publishing results from the *National Longitudinal Transition Study* (NLTS). Among the findings from the 1993 NLTS are the following common characteristics for students with disabilities:

#### Arrest Rates

- Arrest rates increased over time among youth with disabilities, from 19 percent when they had been out of secondary school up to two years to 30 percent three years later.
- Arrest rates were relatively high for youth with learning disabilities (31 percent had been arrested three to five years after high school).
- By the time youth with emotional disturbances had been out of school three to five years, 58 percent had been arrested at some time.

#### Employment (percentage competitively employed and average wage)

- The rate of competitive employment for youth with disabilities increased from 46 percent for those out of school up to two years to 57 percent three years later. Nonetheless, the rate remained lower than for youth in the general population (69 percent).
- Despite wage advances, the median hourly wage was still \$5.72 in 1990, representing an annual income of less than \$12,000 for youth employed full time.

#### Graduation and Drop out

- Thirty-eight percent of students with disabilities who left school did so by dropping out—30 percent during high school and eight percent before entering high school.

#### Postsecondary Education/Training

- Twenty-seven percent of youth with disabilities never enrolled in postsecondary school (compared with 68 percent of youth in the general population).
- Even among graduates, enrollment rates were 37 percent for those with disabilities (compared with 78 percent of youth in the general population).

#### The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997

IDEA 1997 (the reauthorization of IDEA 1990) enhanced transition requirements. It shifted the focus from the provision of transition services to the outcomes those services produced. In part, IDEA 1997 called specifically for *a statement of the transition service needs* of the child that focuses on the child's courses of study (vii)(I) and a statement of needed transition services for the child that focuses on interagency responsibilities and linkages(ii).

These enhancements were intended to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and to a considerable degree, they have done so. Seven years after the original NLTS, NLTS2 was initiated.

### What is MTSA?

The Michigan Transition Services Association is an organization whose goal is to provide leadership, promote professional preparation and growth, and keep community partners aware of current issues and trends in transition related issues.

Michigan Transition Services Association is an organization whose membership includes school professionals, as well as community partners and other stakeholders involved in providing transition services to assist students in reaching their post-school vision.

For more information about MTSA, visit the MTSA Web site at <http://michigantasa.com>

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Following is a summary of findings from NLTS2 (SRI International, 2006).

- Students with learning disabilities are very likely to take at least one class in the general education settings (94 percent). Eighty percent of students take one or more.
- Secondary students are as likely to take language arts in general education settings as in special education settings. However, math (62 percent vs. 43 percent), science (74 percent vs. 29 percent), social studies (71 percent vs. 32 percent) and foreign language courses (90 percent vs. nine percent) are more likely to be taken in general education settings.
- Thirty-five percent of secondary students with disabilities receive unmodified, standard general education curriculum. Fifty-two percent receive some modifications. Eleven percent receive substantial modifications, and two percent receive specialized curriculum.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education's report, *Thirty Years of Progress in Educating Children with Disabilities Through IDEA (2005)* cites from NLTS2 the following:

- The incidence of students with disabilities completing high school, rather than dropping out, increased by 17 percent between 1987 and 2003.
- Postsecondary education participation by students with disabilities more than doubled, to 32 percent.
- Seventy percent of students with disabilities, who had been out of school for up to two years, had paying jobs. This compares to only 55 percent in 1987.

Clearly, outcomes are improving thanks to the hard work of parents, students, educators, and legislators. However, some unfortunate trends continue to present barriers for students with disabilities (from the NLTS2 Executive Summary 2006).

### **Academic performance**

- Seventy-five percent of students with disabilities score below the mean for the general population (mean = 100 with a standard deviation = 15).
- Fourteen to 27 percent of youth with disabilities scored more than two standard deviations below the mean.
- Youth with disabilities experience the greatest difficulty with reading comprehension (mean score of 79 compared to mean score of 84 for non-disabled youth).
- Youth with disabilities from low income households have lower average scores in all domains independent of racial/ethnic and other differences.
- Higher absenteeism and disciplinary problems are associated with lower scores in math.

### **Functional performance**

- Average test scores for youth with disabilities range from 43 to 57 compared to a mean of 100 for the general population (mean = 100 with a standard deviation of 15).
- Twenty-two to 38 percent of youth with disabilities have scores more than six standard deviations below the mean.
- Youth with disabilities demonstrate their lowest scores in community living and measures of broad independence.

### **Youth Out of School**

(*After High School: A First Look at the Post-School Experiences of Youth with Disabilities*, April 2005).

- Twenty-eight percent leave school without receiving a diploma. Forty-four percent of youth with emotional disturbances drop out of school.
- The majority of out-of-school youth with learning disabilities or emotional disturbances are male.
- Social skills are the most problematic for all categories of youth, especially for youth with an emotional disturbance.



## Figure 1

The specific accomplishments in educating children with disabilities can be summarized as follows:

### Identification and service...

- Numbers served. Three decades ago, more than a million children with disabilities received no educational services at all. Untold numbers of students had disabilities that were never detected or were incorrectly diagnosed. Today, approximately 6.5 million children with disabilities are receiving special education services.

### Access to public education...

- Thirty years ago, only one out of every five children with disabilities was educated in a traditional school. Today, the overwhelming majority of children with disabilities—approximately 96 percent—learn in traditional schools with non-disabled children, rather than in state institutions or separate facilities.

Other accomplishments in educating children with disabilities:

### Inclusion in general education classrooms...

- Three-quarters of students with disabilities now spend at least 40 percent of their day in a regular education classroom with non-disabled peers, instead of in separate rooms. Almost half of the students with disabilities spend at least 80 percent of their day in regular classrooms.

### Services for children from birth to age 22... (birth to age 26 in Michigan)

- The number of infants and toddlers receiving early intervention services for developmental delays or other disabilities has increased more than sixfold in the past 25 years.

### Participation in standardized testing...

- More and more students with disabilities are participating in the same state and national standardized testing programs as other students. In almost two-thirds of the states, the average scores for students with disabilities on state tests have risen or remained stable during the past few years.

Other accomplishments in educating children with disabilities:

### High school graduation...

- High school graduation rates for students with disabilities have gone up slowly but steadily in recent years.

### College enrollment...

- College enrollment rates among students with disabilities have more than tripled in 20 years. In 1978, just under 3 percent of college freshmen reported that they had a disability, while in 1998, the figure was more than 9 percent.

### Employment rates...

- Young adults with disabilities are employed at a higher rate than their older counterparts who did not have the benefit of the IDEA. Young people with disabilities who earn a college degree now fare nearly as well in the job market as non-disabled college graduates.

### Teachers...

- The special education teaching force has more than doubled in the past two decades. As a result, the ratio of pupils with disabilities per special education teacher has been reduced from 21 pupils in 1977 to 16 pupils in 1994.

Other accomplishments in educating children with disabilities:

### Parent involvement...

- Thirty years ago, parents of children with disabilities had little say in the education of their child. Now, more than 85 percent of parents of children with disabilities in preschool and elementary school are actively involved in planning their child's individualized services as well as making other educational decisions.

### Attitudes and empowerment...

- Children with and without disabilities have learned to respect each other, cooperate, and appreciate each individual's worth. Young people with disabilities are better prepared to participate fully in and contribute meaningfully to society.

Source: *Twenty-five Years of Educating Children with Disabilities: The Good News and the Work Ahead*. A PDF version of the publication is available at [www.aypf.org](http://www.aypf.org) or [www.ctredpol.org](http://www.ctredpol.org).



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## Figure 2

Key challenges and needs in special education can be summarized as follows:

### **Academic preparation...**

- Students with disabilities achieve at significantly lower levels, on average, than their non-disabled peers. They are held to lower expectations and are less likely than non-disabled students to take a full academic curriculum in high school.

### **Minority over-representation...**

- African American students are referred to special education at higher rates than their share of the overall population.

### **High school completion...**

- Only 55 percent of students with disabilities leave high school with a standard diploma, compared with three-fourths of the general student population. Young people with disabilities still drop out of high school at twice the rate of their peers.

### **Postsecondary education...**

- Young people with disabilities are less likely to go on to postsecondary education than non-disabled students, and those who start college are less likely to finish.

### **Low employment rates...**

- Young people with disabilities have less secure futures. Only 50 percent of working-age adults with disabilities were employed in 1997, compared with 84 percent of non-disabled adults.

### **Teacher shortages and needs...**

- Many school districts are struggling to fill shortages of special education teachers. Regular classroom teachers do not feel well prepared to address the special needs of students with disabilities. Many special education teachers are overwhelmed by paperwork and time demands related to federal requirements.

### **Technology...**

- Many students with disabilities who could benefit from assistive technologies do not have access to them. Barriers such as inadequate teacher training impede students with disabilities from using Internet technologies.

Source: *Twenty-five Years of Educating Children with Disabilities: The Good News and the Work Ahead*. A PDF version of the publication is available at [www.aypf.org](http://www.aypf.org) or [www.ctredpol.org](http://www.ctredpol.org).



**Figure 3**

**Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975**

Established free and appropriate public education for handicapped children.

Established that special education services would be provided at no cost to students and families.

Established that each eligible child would have an individualized education program. Established that education services were the responsibility of both regular and special education.

Established that education services would be provided in the least restrictive environment possible.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004**

(34) **TRANSITION SERVICES**—The term ‘transition services’ means a coordinated set of activities for **a child with a disability** that—

(A) is designed to be within a **results-oriented process**, that is **focused on improving the academic and functional achievement** of the child with a disability to **facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment** (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or **community participation**; (B) is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s **strengths, preferences, and interests**; and (C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

- Rates of youth with disabilities attending postsecondary education are less than half that of the general population.
- Youth with disabilities are less than 25 percent as likely to take classes at a four-year college than youth in the general population.
- Approximately five percent of youth with disabilities attend postsecondary vocational, business, or technical schools.

**The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004**

On December 3, 2004, President George W. Bush signed into law the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) of 2004. This piece of legislation augments the transition mandates of IDEA 1990 and the enhancements to transition found in the reauthorization of IDEA in 1997. In part, IDEA 2004 states “(14) As the graduation rates for children with disabilities continue to climb, providing

effective transition services to promote successful post-school employment or education is an important measure of accountability for children with disabilities.” To compare the changes in the provision of services from 1975 to 2004 (see Figure 3 above).

Additionally, IDEA 2004 states that transition services must include:

- (aa) Appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals based upon **age-appropriate transition assessments** related to training, education, employment, and, when appropriate, independent living skills.
- (bb) The transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals.

**The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001**

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001 sets three key provisions for all public schools: 1) increased



## What Is MI-TOP?

In 2003, Michigan began a comprehensive statewide initiative driven by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) of 1997 secondary transition requirements. The mission of the Michigan Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP) initiative is to facilitate the development of effective systems that support students to achieve post-school outcomes and contain measurable student-focused planning, student development activities, and continuous family and community involvement.

For more information, visit Michigan's Transition Resources Web site at [www.cenmi.org/tspmi](http://www.cenmi.org/tspmi).

To learn more about the *Michigan Merit Curriculum*, visit [www.cenmi.org](http://www.cenmi.org) and read *Leading Change*, Fall 2006 or visit [www.michigan.gov/highschool](http://www.michigan.gov/highschool).



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accountability for improved student achievement, 2) ensuring the availability of quality options for all students, and 3) ensuring Highly Qualified teachers for every child. "IDEA is now aligned with the important principles of NCLB in promoting accountability for results, enhancing the role of parents, and improving student achievement through instructional approaches that are based on scientific research. While IDEA focuses on the needs of individual students, and NCLB focuses on school accountability, both laws share the goal of improving academic achievement through high expectations and high-quality education programs" (U.S. Department of Education, 2005).

### **The Michigan Merit Curriculum**

Federal legislation coincides with state and national high school reform efforts. In Michigan, the *Michigan Merit Curriculum* (Public Acts 123 and 124) was signed into law by Governor Jennifer M. Granholm and took effect in April 2006.

The intent of this law is to strengthen Michigan's high school curriculum requirements to ensure that every student in Michigan is prepared for college, technical training, or the workplace after graduation.

The Michigan State Board of Education firmly believes that students in special education can learn and participate in the general education setting, and that students in special education should be given every opportunity to be successful.

Studies show that most students are more likely to pass high-level courses; however, some students are going to need support to meet the more rigorous high school graduation requirements.

Under the *Michigan Merit Curriculum*, students in special education are considered general education students first, and by law must be given access to, and support for, success in the general curriculum. The student's individualized education program (IEP), which should include coordinated

transition services and activities as well as courses of study, must detail the appropriate education plan of support for student success.

### **Twenty-Five Years of Educating Children With Disabilities: The Good News and the Work Ahead**

Together, the IDEA 2004 transition provisions, NCLB, and the *Michigan Merit Curriculum* encourage a plan of action that will inspire a shift in thinking about what transition means for each student. By narrowing the gap between general and special education students, no child will be left behind on the road to a successful future.

Aligning reform efforts to achieve success for each student is one aspect of a cultural shift. In 2002, the American Youth Policy Forum and the Center on Education Policy reviewed data about progress in educating children with disabilities. This report, *The Good News and the Work Ahead 2002*, summarizes what has been learned about accomplishments in special education and the critical work remaining (see Figures 1 and 2 on pages 7 and 8). The report's findings can be broadly summarized as such: the 25-year effort to improve education for children with disabilities has been remarkably successful but has not gone far enough.

### **The Good News**

Good news can be found on several fronts—from the growing number of children with disabilities being educated in regular classrooms to the rising number attending college. Before presenting specific data on progress, the report offers three broad observations.

1. The goal of ensuring access to public education for students with disabilities has largely been met. Children with disabilities have moved—in massive numbers—from institutions, home education, or no education to their neighborhood

public schools. Children have gone from learning in segregated environments to learning in regular education classrooms with non-disabled peers. Disabilities are being identified at a younger age, and many more infants and toddlers are receiving early intervention services.

2. The IDEA has been a major force behind this progress, but credit is also due to parents and educators and to a general change in attitudes about children with disabilities. The legal protections of the IDEA were instrumental in spurring states and school districts to change their policies and classroom practices—changes that probably would not have occurred with a less far reaching and assertive statute.

The IDEA, however, did not exist in a vacuum. Momentum also came from parents, who pressed schools to follow the law when children with disabilities were not being adequately served, and teachers and administrators who worked hard to make the law succeed with less federal funding than expected. Such diverse forces as court decisions, the civil rights movement, and federal anti-poverty programs also helped to raise citizens' awareness about the rights of people with disabilities.

3. A solid infrastructure is now in place for educating children with disabilities. A system exists for identifying, evaluating, and serving children with disabilities beginning at birth. Special education teachers are more numerous and better integrated into school operations, and they know much more than they did two decades ago about effective ways to teach children with disabilities. Principals and general education teachers are also more familiar with special education issues, procedures, and teaching methods.

## The Work Ahead

While progress is being made by implementing increasingly more specific legislation mandates, achieving the true intent of the law remains elusive. The intent was not to overly burden the system with mandates that require significant documentation, but rather to accomplish a shift in what the culture of education views as its essential role—**quality education assists the student in developing a postsecondary vision and a pathway to obtain that vision.**

In the context of current education law, we are faced with the following challenges:

- All stakeholders must understand the importance of transition in education. Transition as a perspective represents both a starting point and a finish line for each student's pathway toward achieving their individual potential. Thinking in terms of transition provides relevance in education; it captures the original intent of helping students be better prepared for life after high school.
- The need for higher expectations and accountability is clear. In the face of high-stakes assessment requirements, however, we must ensure that each child's expectations are based on their strengths and preferences rather than on a set of predetermined standards.

For a history of IDEA visit [www.ed.gov/policy/special/leg/idea/history.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/policy/special/leg/idea/history.pdf).

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## RESOURCES

### Michigan Education Web Sites

#### Michigan Department of Education

[www.michigan.gov/mde](http://www.michigan.gov/mde)

#### Michigan Department of Education's School Improvement Web Site

[www.michigan.gov/schoolimprovement](http://www.michigan.gov/schoolimprovement)

#### Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Office of Special Education/Early Intervention Services (OSE/EIS)

[www.michigan.gov/ose-eis](http://www.michigan.gov/ose-eis)

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