



# 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 Michigan Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP). Over the past three decades, legislation and educational practice designed to support students in transition have evolved to a point where “transition” can no longer be approached as something “owned” by special education. Appropriate support for students with individualized education programs (IEPs) in transition cannot be provided in a silo—separate from the general education system. Effective transition planning for each and every student promotes successful participation in the general education system. Students must be supported by education professionals to promote relevance in their education and make them feel safe, challenged, and valued for their potential.

## The Right Stuff: Understanding Appropriate “Coordinated Education”

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

As mandated by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* of 2004, Michigan has worked hard to provide transition services for its secondary students with disabilities.

The Michigan Transition Services Association (MTSA) 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.

MTSA’s 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.

This *FOCUS on Results* document is intended to offer guidance and technical assistance in supporting students in the process of transitioning to postsecondary life.

Section 1401 of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) defines free and appropriate education as:

- (9) Free appropriate public education. The term “free appropriate public education” means special education and related services that:
  - (a) Have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge.
  - (b) Meet the standards of the State educational agency.
  - (c) Include an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the State involved.
  - (d) Are provided in conformity with the individualized education program (IEP) required under section 614(d) [20USCS 1414(d)].

This is a nice place to start, but not very helpful in planning for individual students and their unique educational needs. At the very least, appropriate education is more than an accommodation for the student based on their disability. The IDEA and the *No*



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*Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act clearly indicate that preparing students for success beyond high school and into a highly technical and economically challenging world is a primary objective of public education. There must be a shift from simple access to ensuring that students are educationally prepared for the challenges they will face after high school—whether those challenges include work, college, or both. The purpose is to prepare students to become successful, contributing members of society.

Access to a free and appropriate public education was established with the *Education for all Handicapped Children Act* of 1975. Since then, tremendous progress has been made to ensure access to educational opportunities for students with diverse abilities. However, education as a system has historically struggled with the definition of an “appropriate education” for each and every student. It might be helpful to look at practices that help to identify “appropriate education.”

In view of current high school redesign initiatives and accompanying legislation, appropriate education must now be viewed in terms of helping students find their unique pathway from school to the world of work, continuing education, and adult life.

School improvement research suggests that for students to be successful, educational programming must incorporate the three Rs (Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships). Relevance engages the student, while relationships support the student as they learn through a rigorous curriculum (see Figure 1 on page 4).

Providing an appropriate education by strictly focusing on rigorous academics does not necessarily prepare students for success after high school. By simply focusing on the rigor, the relevance to the

student’s vision, as well as the relationships that may support the student as he or she works toward long-term goals, are lost. To ensure that quality relationships and curriculum align with student visions, education must start with the student’s current functioning level. This includes a recognition of the student’s “inner genius” as defined by Denise Bissonnette ([www.diversityworld.com/Denise\\_Bissonnette/index.htm](http://www.diversityworld.com/Denise_Bissonnette/index.htm)) and should clearly outline the steps the student MIGHT take on his or her personal pathway from school to work and adult life. This method is commonly known as an educational development plan (EDP).

## Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC)

On April 20, 2006, the *Michigan Merit Curriculum* (MMC) took effect, and the graduation landscape in Michigan changed. With the MMC and the personal curriculum option (see sidebar on page 7), content standards and expectations become constants while time and instructional delivery become flexible and variable. The law strengthens Michigan’s high school curriculum requirements to ensure that each student in Michigan is prepared for college, technical training, or the workplace following graduation.

Students with educational challenges CAN succeed in achieving the new rigorous standards and benchmarks established in the MMC. However, the number of students who succeed in school will be greatly increased if an individual learning plan is developed wisely. In developing a plan, those involved in the student’s transition process must come together and reach agreement. The transition expertise that has been developed statewide must be used and the three Rs must be engaged at each level and with each activity in the student’s educational process. Providing students with an appropriate education helps them to achieve success and move toward

their visions for the future. Providing students with a coordinated education ensures they can accomplish an appropriate education.

### **Coordinated Education: What Is the Intent?**

In response to concern over low graduation rates and poor outcomes for students with IEPs, Congress required transition services for students with disabilities in secondary education. The language and 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. Credit is also due to parents and educators and to a general change in society's attitude about disabilities.

IDEA defines transition services as "a coordinated set of activities that will assist the student to prepare for postsecondary activities such as postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, and community participation." Direction in understanding coordination and how it can be effectively implemented into the educational system, as it relates to transition, has come from both state and national experts. Transition, simply put, is movement from one point, position, or place to another. In IDEA terms, this movement must be a planned, coordinated set of activities that takes an individual student from where he or she is to where he or she wants to be after graduation from high school.

"Coordination" by definition is fairly straightforward. However, in practice, educators have struggled with what it means within the context of statutory compliance and quality education planning. The basic definition of "coordination" is to harmonize (work together) in a common action or effort. For

coordination to occur, there must be more than one person or entity involved and a common focus. Legislation and best practice both support the student's postsecondary goal (e.g. post-school vision) as the common focus. This basic understanding of coordinated transition is clear; however, effective implementation of coordinated transition raises many questions.

### **Understanding and Implementing the Key Elements**

A coordinated set of transition activities should be viewed from many perspectives. Individual participants may choose to view transition from the perspective of the IEP process, rigorous student curriculum, post-school vision, student-centered planning, family involvement, or supportive relationships, etc.

Individuals involved in educational planning for each student must help the student develop a postsecondary vision and the pathway to obtain that vision using information from these various perspectives.

**Key elements** of a coordinated transition effort embedded within the educational process are aligned with the student's postsecondary goals and should:

1. Assist the student in ***developing and refining his or her post-school vision*** based on interests and innate abilities.
2. Assist the student in ***building relationships*** with others that will provide support along the way.
3. Assist the student in ***engaging in activities (including course of study) that align*** with his or her post-school vision.

For this set of activities to be coordinated, those involved in the activities must agree on the following:

- The student's unique interests and abilities or aptitudes.

## **IDEA Defines Transition**

The IDEA defines transition services as "a coordinated set of activities that will assist the student to prepare for postsecondary activities such as postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services and community participation."

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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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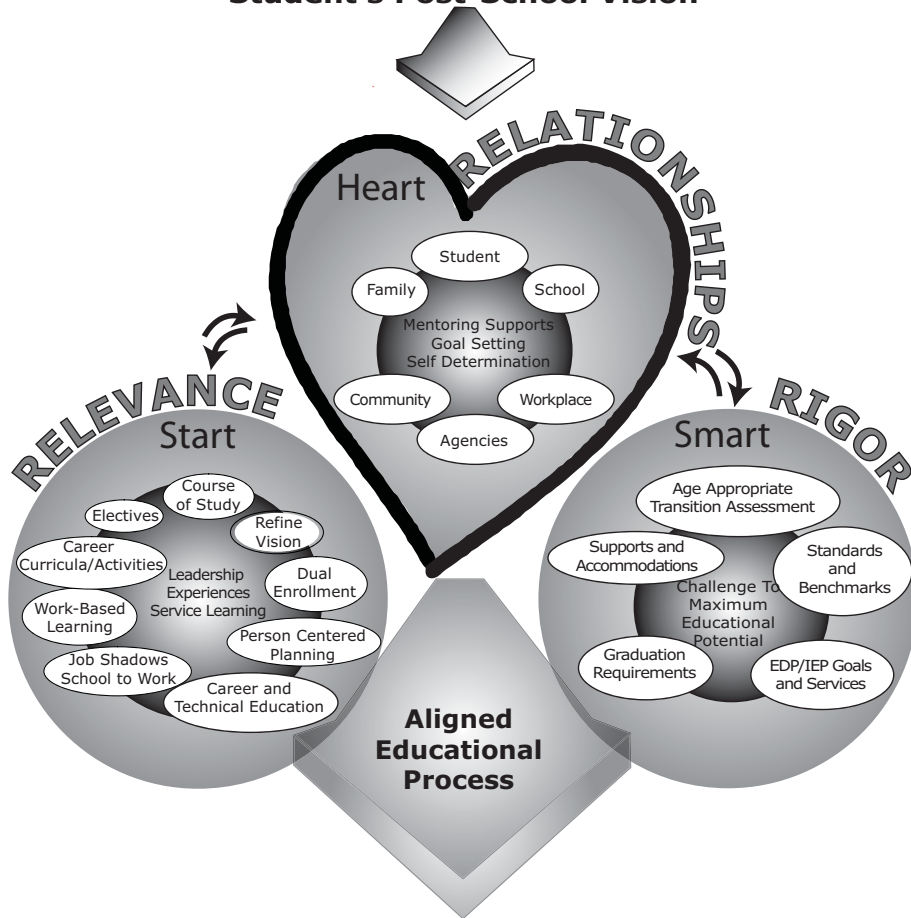
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The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is in compliance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as amended, 20 U.S.C. 1681 et seq. (Title IX), and its implementing regulation, at 34 C.F.R. Part 106, which prohibits discrimination based 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.

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Roberta E. Stanley, Director, Office of Administrative Law and Federal Relations, Michigan Department of Education, Hannah Building, 608 West Allegan, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, Michigan 48909, Phone: (517) 335-0436, Email: stanleyr@michigan.gov.

**Figure 1: Coordinated Education Involves Student's Post-School Vision**



Coordinated Education assists the student in developing a postsecondary vision and the pathway to obtain the vision.

- The student's potential to achieve and engage in life-long learning.
- The student's current position in relation to achieving his or her post-school vision.
- The activities that will most likely enable the student to reach his or her goals.

through supports and accommodations, including goal setting and identifying programs to help students meet those goals. Appropriate assessments continually define strengths, needs, interests, and preferences related to the post-school vision.

**Coordinated Education Model Aligns With the Three Rs**

Coordinated education challenges the student to reach his or her maximum educational potential through a **rigorous** curriculum. Graduation requirements are typically composed of standards, benchmarks, and content expectations. Coordinated education ensures access to each requirement

As each student's post-school vision is developed, academic and age-appropriate assessments (academic, functional, and transition) help define the student's current performance in the context of his or her needs, interests, and strengths. This data serves as a focal point for continuous planning. Coordinated education includes each student's course of study and provided transition services, which incorporate **relevance** by engaging in



activities that support the student's vision. As each student moves forward in his or her course of study and experiences, re-evaluation and refinement of the vision occurs.

An IEP and/or EDP is utilized to help each student document strengths and accomplishments and to explore preferences and interests while striving toward the post-school vision. Coordinated education continues as each student's course of study is developed and appropriate supports and accommodations are put into place enabling each individual student to participate effectively in the general curriculum while achieving the maximum educational benefit in the context of the rigorous MMC.

**Relevance** is defined as "related, bearing on the matter at hand; fitting or suiting the given requirements; applicable." A relevant education must consist of the appropriate course of study, along with activities and services that relate to the student's post-school vision. These include career curricula and activities, electives, school-to-work job shadows, work-based learning, career and technical education, and dual enrollment. Leadership and service-learning experiences help the student to learn about further aspects of him or herself. The student may re-evaluate and refine the vision during the course of his or her studies.

Coordinated education takes place in the context of connections with people. The third "R" is **relationships**.

**Relationships** can involve mentoring, self advocacy and self-determination awareness, conflict resolution, and goal-setting activities. Students need assistance in making connections and supportive relationships in various environments. As students move from preschool, through elementary and middle school, and on to high school, they build awareness, skills, knowledge, and **relationships** that lead to their postsecondary vision. To successfully

achieve their unique vision, students need supportive **relationships**—people working together in a "coordinated" way. Family members, peers, and adults in the schools and communities are at the heart of these relationships. Figure 2 on page 6 serves as an outline to guide teams in developing and fulfilling roles, while supporting students on their unique pathways.

## Michigan's Transition History

Transition Services Project (TSP) began in 1998 and concluded in 2002. This was Michigan's initial statewide initiative to address the new legislative requirement of transition services for students with disabilities in secondary education (IDEA 1997). For five years, TSP broadened statewide awareness of secondary transition requirements, gathered and disseminated information, and spotlighted innovative transition activities and supported their implementation. During this process, the TSP collaborated with various experts in the field of transition looking to the work of Dr. Paula Kohler, Dr. Ed O'Leary, Dr. Sharon Field, and others (see Resources on page 8). A train-the-trainer approach was used, resulting in many parents, educators, and community members developing expertise in family involvement, student development, student focused planning, and development of transition policies and procedures.

## Michigan's Transition Outcomes Project

In 2003, Michigan began a new comprehensive statewide initiative to deepen the implementation of secondary transition requirements by developing a statewide system for collecting and analyzing data related to transition known as **Michigan's Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP)**. The mission of MI-TOP is to facilitate the development of effective systems that support students to achieve desired post-school outcomes.

## What Is an EDP?

**Educational Development Plan (EDP):** According to the Office of Career and Technical Education, each Michigan student should develop an initial EDP before beginning high school, stating an initial career goal and desired work and educational experiences. Students should update this EDP from time to time, and the school should keep an ongoing record of career planning that will guide the student in taking effective steps to enter his or her career of choice. A school's success in meeting this goal is one of Michigan's *Education YES!* "Indicators of School Performance" and is reported on the school's annual report card.

## What Is an IEP?

**Individualized Education Program (IEP):** The U.S. Department of Education's Federal Register (October 2006) and the Michigan Department of Education's Revised Administrative Rules for Special Education (November 2002) define an "IEP" as a written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised annually. This mandatory, written plan documents the education programs and services that students eligible for special education will receive. Federal rules and regulations determine what must be included in the IEP. The IEP team must review the IEP annually.

For definitions to more key terms, visit CEN at [www.cenmi.org](http://www.cenmi.org).



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**Rigor, Relevance,  
Relationships  
Support  
Transition**

**Rigor** sets higher standards, encouraging and supporting students to achieve to their full educational potential.

**Relevance** ensures that the student's post-school vision drives greater engagement in his or her educational experience.

**Relationships** connect the student with people who promote relevance in their education and make the student feel safe, challenged, and valued for his or her potential.

**Figure 2**

**Coordinated Education  
Roles and Responsibilities**  
POSITIVE POSTSECONDARY AND ADULT LIFE SUCCESS

**POST-SCHOOL VISION**

**HIGH SCHOOL**

**RIGOR**

Rigorous academics and assessments. Electives in area of vision. Goal setting. *Michigan Merit Curriculum* core credits. Electives in vision area. Update assessments. Service learning. Maximize educational potential.

**RELEVANCE**

Continue to refine vision and explore postsecondary training options. Refine EDP. Career and Technical Education, Work-Based Learning, Job shadows, and college visit opportunities.

**RELATIONSHIPS**

Broaden relationships with other schools and beyond the local community. Establish connections in community agencies, higher education, apprenticeships, etc. Active family involvement in student-led IEPs/EDPs. Personal growth.

**MIDDLE SCHOOL**

**RIGOR**

Assessment and rigorous academic instruction. Rigorous course of study. Continued assessment and data collection for planning. Courses, experiences related to vision. Goal setting.

**RELEVANCE**

Explore in more detail career options and begin to form a vision. Career and vocational curricula. Student involvement in IEP. Career exploration activities.

**RELATIONSHIPS**

Widen scope of relationships in larger school setting and into the local community. Student involvement in EDP/IEP. Expand peer relations and interactions. Self-advocacy, conflict resolution. Self-determination. Involve family in support and planning.

**PRE-SCHOOL through ELEMENTARY**

**RIGOR**

Begin building basic skills in core curricular areas. Teach basic skills in core content areas. Initial assessment for needs. Initiate supports and accommodations. Initiate database for decision making.

**RELEVANCE**

Build awareness of different roles/careers a person can fulfill. Begin career curricula exposure. Begin discovery of student strengths, interests, and challenges. As needed develop IEP. Later elementary begin student involvement in IEP.

**RELATIONSHIPS**

Initiate building of basic relationships. Relationships to provide support and accommodations. Begin to build framework to provide services. Build and strengthen relations between school and family.

Every student is surrounded by others who can fulfill these roles. The individuals will be unique to each student.



The first round of statewide data collection utilized an IEP checklist developed by the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Centers. This checklist reflects Dr. Ed O'Leary's five-step process, which provides structure for the secondary IEP process by beginning with and centering all planning on the student's post-school vision from the start. MI-TOP collected data on the implementation of secondary transition requirements and the elements of the five-step process in IEPs state-wide. The data generated was used for professional development and improvements in transition planning at the local educational agency level.

### **Federal Law**

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 strengthened transition language by adding measures of accountability: "(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."

### **State Performance Plan (SPP)**

All states, including Michigan, report the progress of students with disabilities to the U.S. Department of Education to ensure quality practice and compliance. The reporting is done through a comprehensive State Performance Plan (SPP). Four of Michigan's SPP indicators relate to transition.

- Indicator 1 - Graduation
- Indicator 2 - Dropout
- Indicator 13 - Secondary Transition
- Indicator 14 - Post-School Outcomes

SPP indicator 13 measures the "percentage of youth aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes coordinated, measurable, annual IEP goals and transition services that will reasonably enable the student to meet the postsecondary goals."

SPP 14 measures the "percentage of youth who had IEPs, are no longer in secondary school, and who have been competitively employed, enrolled in some type of post-secondary school, or both, within one year of leaving high school." The MI-TOP developed a checklist and trained intermediate school district (ISD) teams to collect data as a measure of compliance for SPP 13. The "coordinated concept" is a significant component of SPP 13. The checklist requires aligning the IEP objectives with postsecondary goals. The state continues to collect data in various ways to measure compliance and performance on the indicators.

### **Conclusion**

The practice of coordinating a student's education is documented in research, supported by legislation, and necessary for success in today's highly technical and challenging world. Given an educational environment of increased accountability and higher student expectations, an appropriate education with coordinated elements will enable each and every student to achieve success as he or she moves toward post-school goals.

### **Personal Curriculum**

A personal curriculum is a documented process that may modify certain requirements of the *Michigan Merit Curriculum*. In Sections 1278b(5), 1278b(5)(b), and 1278b(5)(c) the *Michigan Merit Curriculum* Law contains language that allows the parent or legal guardian of a pupil to request a personal curriculum (PC) for that pupil that modifies certain requirements of the Michigan Merit Standard requirements. The pupil, at least one of his or her parents or his or her guardian, and his or her high school counselor or other designee selected by the high school principal must develop the PC. Additionally, a PC must incorporate as much of the subject area content expectations of the Michigan Merit Standard as "practicable."

A PC must work in coordination with any other plans a student has in effect, such as the educational development plan (EDP) and the individualized educational program (IEP).

For more detailed information on the law regarding a PC visit, [www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/faq12\\_178604\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/faq12_178604_7.pdf)



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## **RESOURCES**

### **Michigan Transition Resources: Michigan Department of Education's Transition Web Site**

[www.cenmi.org/tspmi/default.asp](http://www.cenmi.org/tspmi/default.asp)

### **PACER Center Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Q & A: Section 504 & Postsecondary Education**

[www.pacer.org/text/pride/504.htm](http://www.pacer.org/text/pride/504.htm)

### **Learning Disabilities (LD) Online: Transition—School to Work**

[www.ldonline.org/indepth/transition](http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/transition)

**Taxonomy for  
Transition Programming, Dr. Paula Kohler**  
<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~kohlerp/pdf/Taxonomy.pdf>

**Information on Dr. Ed O'Leary's Work**  
[www1.usu.edu/mprrc/curproj/sectrans/sectrans.cfm](http://www1.usu.edu/mprrc/curproj/sectrans/sectrans.cfm)

**Information on Dr. Sharon Field's Work**  
[www.cenmi.org/focus/transition/sept05/article\\_05-04.asp#Author](http://www.cenmi.org/focus/transition/sept05/article_05-04.asp#Author), and  
[www.nsttac.org/?FileName=sharon\\_field&type=kg](http://www.nsttac.org/?FileName=sharon_field&type=kg)

### **National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center**

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

### **Michigan Transition Services Association**

<http://michigantsa.com>

## **Michigan Education Web Sites**

### **Michigan Department of Education**

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

### **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)

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

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

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