

Enhancing transition outcomes for youth with disabilities: The partnerships for youth initiative

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Abstract. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) encouraged the establishment of partnerships to address employment barriers facing individuals with disabilities and emphasized the coordination of services in order to improve the employment outcomes of these individuals. In response to WIA requirements, New York State established partnerships with local workforce investment boards, one-stop centers and their partners, school districts, employers, community and employment service providers to coordinate resources that would improve school-to-work transition and particularly employment outcomes for students with disabilities. While increased awareness and utilization of workforce development and vocational rehabilitation systems were positive outcomes of these initiatives, systemic issues in these systems are likely to undermine long-term transition outcomes of youth.

Keywords: School-to-work transition, youth with disabilities, partnership and employment

1. Introduction

In the past decade, transition from school to work for youth with disabilities has undergone considerable changes as a variety of approaches have been proposed to address the challenges facing these youth. Lately, there has been an interest in promoting the development of collaborative partnerships as a component of school-to-work transition, with a goal of ensuring improved transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. Recent legislation, which has called for the development of partnerships to address the challenges facing youth with disabilities leaving school to join the world of work, has provided much of the impetus for this collaboration. For instance, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994 (P.L.103–239) encouraged the development of partnerships among schools, employers, parents and others that would ensure students have the job training skills and work experience necessary to

enable them succeed in the workplace. Similarly, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 (P.L. 105–220) required that a broad range of coordinated services for youth be provided to ensure improved employment outcomes for these individuals. Collectively, these legislative initiatives represent a concerted effort to better meet the needs of youth with disabilities as they prepare to exit the education system to enter the workforce.

Much of the focus on transition for students with disabilities has been directed at the transition process, and particularly, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) implementation [6]. In addition to the legislation, there has been an interest in the role of different systems involved in the transition process. Several recent studies have examined the role that schools play in implementing transition for students with disabilities [7]. Besides the educational system, other systems involved in the transition process, in particular, the vocational rehabilitation system and its role in fa-

Facilitating the employment of individuals with disabilities, has been the subject of several accounts. Among the aspects that have been examined are factors that enhance vocational outcomes for young adults with disabilities [1]. Despite the growing role of the workforce development system in transition for youth with disabilities, it has received little attention in the literature. WIA, which led to the creation of One-Stop Centers, requires that employment services and supports be provided to a broad variety of individuals, including youth with disabilities. This legislation also requires that youth be provided with services that will result in improved employment outcomes once they exit the school system.

Recent studies have begun to examine WIA-related initiatives and the impact of the legislation on different systems. One account documented a consumer's experience with customized employment at a One-Stop Center in an urban setting and explored the Center staff role in facilitating employment for the individual [11]. In another study, the integration of WIA elements in a summer program serving youth with visual impairments and its impact on youth transition outcomes was examined [8]. While these accounts have begun to close the gap in the literature, there is much to be learned about WIA programs, and particularly those targeting youth.

Moreover, with the exception of a study that examined partners collaborating to implement WIA and how three states have developed and increased One-Stop Center capacity to better meet the needs of individuals with disabilities seeking employment [13], little is known about WIA-related initiatives that are geared toward improving outcomes for individuals with disabilities and their impact on outcomes. To better understand WIA impact in other systems, there is a need to generalize beyond existing accounts. To that end, this article examines partnerships developed between state workforce development systems in conjunction with other local entities to demonstrate effective approaches in facilitating employment transition services for youth with disabilities at One-Stop Centers. The Partnerships for Youth (PFY) initiative encouraged the coordination of resources using partnerships as a way to build employment transition at One-Stop Centers. The article builds on several studies that have focused on partnerships and have examined the role of individuals with disabilities as partners in employment with vocational rehabilitation agencies and independent living centers [3], ways to enhance the capacity of different systems to meet outcomes of individuals with disabilities [10], and the challenges associated with collaboration [9].

In the first section, an overview of youth with disabilities and employment is provided. It is followed by an overview of the partnerships for youth initiative, highlighting partner roles, services provided to youth, and project outcomes. Finally, systemic barriers that are likely to impact on youth transition outcomes, and implications for the various services systems, which may have relevance for policymakers in different systems, are discussed.

2. Youth with disabilities and employment

Although students with disabilities share similar post-school goals with their counterparts without disabilities, including attending continuing education and training, attaining employment, enhancing social competencies, and increasing independence, most students with disabilities identify obtaining employment as a primary goal [12]. Both the education and workforce development systems play a major role in facilitating transition from school-to-work for students with disabilities. The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 requires that the education system facilitate student transition from school to adulthood by providing transition planning and services that include their employment goals. Similarly, the vocational rehabilitation system is required by the Rehabilitation Act to provide transition services that will improve the employment outcomes of eligible individuals with disabilities. In New York State, the education system provides the programmatic components and funds transition planning and related services, including providing a free education as defined in the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID), on the other hand, which includes New York's special education and vocational rehabilitation entities, provides complementary services to the education system to students leaving school to enter into the workforce, including assisting these individuals to obtain an employment outcome. Together, these two systems are responsible for providing transition services to students with disabilities while they are still in school.

In recent years, the workforce development system has become increasingly involved in the transition process for students with disabilities. With WIA implementation, states and localities were required to provide a broad range of coordinated services for youth, thus ensuring improved employment outcomes for these individuals. WIA also encouraged the establishment of

workforce investment boards (WIBs) that would develop and oversee an array of employment-related services and supports provided by One-Stop Centers. In response to WIA, the Partnerships for Youth initiative implemented in New York State encouraged workforce systems to explore how to best facilitate collaboration and coordination of services and supports that would address the employment barriers that youth with disabilities face. The partnerships were developed by several One-Stop Centers in conjunction with local workforce investment boards, county youth bureaus, employment and community service providers to demonstrate effective approaches in developing youth employment transition services. The initiative built on the State Department of Labor (DOL) Disability Program Navigator (DPN) initiative, which provides work supports to individuals with disabilities seeking employment at One-Stop Centers. Taken together, these developments represented an effort to positively impact the employment outcomes of youth with disabilities, most of whom have lower graduation rates when compared to their counterparts without disabilities, and like other individuals with disabilities, are less likely to be employed [5].

Funded by the New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC), the intent of the Partnerships for Youth initiative that was implemented from January 2005 – June 2007 was to foster collaboration and coordinate activities among partners, including implementing a variety of approaches that would result in improved employment outcomes for youth with disabilities.

3. The partnerships for youth initiative

3.1. Project overview

In 2004, the DDPC issued a competitive request for proposal (RFP) to foster a comprehensive system of employment preparation for youth with disabilities, and particularly those with developmental disabilities. The goal of this initiative, which targeted a large variety of youth with disabilities ages 18–24, including special education students, out-of-school youth with disabilities and youth with disabilities that were deemed at-risk of not achieving employment or post-secondary outcomes, was to promote effective school-to-work transition. The focus on this population was, in part, borne out of the recognition that students with disabilities lag substantially in their graduation rates when compared

to their counterparts without disabilities. Moreover, in focusing on this population, it was the DDPC's intent to address the projected increase in the number of youth expected to join the job market as well as respond to the needs of a labor market demanding a higher level of skills from individuals seeking employment.

Two key features of the partnerships forged with One-Stop Centers, local WIBs, county youth bureaus, employment and community service providers were to:

- demonstrate effective approaches in developing youth employment transition services at One-Stop Centers and engage employers in providing mentoring, community-based work experiences and customized employment opportunities, and
- provide employment supports, including hands-on, experiential career exploration, community-based vocational assessments, work experiences, job tryouts and other transition to employment services.

Outcomes envisioned by the DDPC included creating and strengthening employment-focused services in local WIBs; supporting local partnerships that would increase employment; engaging employers to provide mentoring, youth assistance skills assessment, community-based work experiences and customized employment opportunities for youth, and incorporating benefits planning in a consistent way that fosters positive employment outcomes.

3.2. Partnerships for youth demonstration projects

In the thirty-month period, five demonstration sites were established across New York State, which included two agencies in urban areas: a local WIB (workforce development consortium) and an independent living center, and three agencies in suburban/rural areas: a WIB, an adult provider agency, and an educational agency, were representative of the diversity of counties and geographical regions of New York State.

Each site developed partnerships with other local agencies, including school districts, employers, employment training centers, and local workforce development systems operating under the auspices of DOL and VESID. While the demonstration sites served youth with disabilities ages 18–24 that were in school as required by the RFP, two of the sites also served youth with disabilities ages 16–17, and one site served several youth ages 14–15. Some of the sites also served youth at-risk of dropping out, out-of-school youth, and unem-

ployed or underemployed dropouts that lacked employment skills and real life experiences in the workforce. For the purpose of this initiative, youth served by these projects had a variety of disabilities, specifically, those defined as having developmental disabilities by the age of 22 and having autism, cerebral palsy, developmental delay, epilepsy, learning disabilities, mental retardation, mental illness, neurological impairments, spina bifida and traumatic brain injury. In addition, several of the sites also served individuals with other disabilities, i.e., physical disabilities.

Most youth with disabilities served by these projects lacked the skills and supports necessary to maintain employment, including lack of a work history, poor social skills, lack of knowledge on employer expectations, workplace etiquette as well as information on benefits.

Quarterly reports submitted to the DDPC over the thirty-month period, which detailed the services and supports provided to youth as well as information gathered during site visits made to the demonstration sites, and quarterly grant cluster conference calls held during the duration of the grant, provided additional insight on project implementation and transition outcomes.

3.3. *New York state partnerships*

The intent of this initiative was to prepare youth with disabilities for post-school employment.

3.3.1. *Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs)*

WIBs were charged to create and oversee an array of youth services and supports within the One-Stop Service delivery system, including facilitating youth access to employment services available at One-Stop Centers such as summer employment, training and educational services. Both WIBs established partnerships with community-based providers, school districts, local Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), VESID and local colleges to increase the employability of youth. Of the two WIBs funded through this initiative, the site located in urban Erie County was housed in a One-Stop Center eased access to services for youth. Despite not being located at a One-Stop Center, the WIB in rural Chemung County referred youth to one of five One-Stop Center satellite offices in the county for services.

3.3.2. *Adult provider agency*

The adult provider agency located in rural Cortland County formed a partnership with several school districts, the local One-Stop Center, VESID, WIB, the county youth bureau and other community employment providers. With its staff stationed at the local One-Stop Center during the duration of the grant, the agency was uniquely positioned to link youth with employment supports, including resources available through the Center. By being located at the One-Stop Center, the adult agency staff consulted with the disability program navigator on employment-related supports available to youth with disabilities. Moreover, with expertise in employment, the business liaison from the agency conducted outreach to local employers and assisted in identifying internships, mentoring, job shadowing and employment opportunities for youth.

3.3.3. *Independent living center*

The independent living center funded through this initiative and located in an urban area (Newburgh, NY) forged a partnership with the One-Stop Center once the grant was initiated and enrolled youth at three One-Stop Center satellite offices. Other partners included local youth bureaus, mental health organizations, community-based agencies, VESID, and county youth and family services. Unlike other demonstration sites, the independent living center, which lacked a working relationship with local schools prior to this initiative, hired a school career developer once the grant was initiated to serve as a liaison to several school districts and facilitate in the recruitment of youth. The agency's prior experience with Orange County Employment Alliance Network (OCEAN) facilitated access to local employers who were instrumental in providing employment opportunities to youth.

3.3.4. *Educational agency*

A Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) located in suburban Long Island formed a partnership agency and worked in collaboration with school districts, the Suffolk County WIB, a One-Stop Center, VESID, a state-run developmental disabilities service office, community service providers, a local university and employers to identify strategies to increase the number of youth with disabilities entering the workforce by providing them with vocational and other employment supports.

Table 1
Partner roles

Entity	Roles
Workforce investment boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Assisted youth with disabilities to find employment. – Assisted employers in finding qualified individuals. – Linked youth to One-Stop Centers and VESID where they obtained employment resources. – Linked youth to service coordination and benefits planning.
One-Stop centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Facilitated access to employment resources available at One-Stop Centers, including job search, pre-vocational training, and Career Zone. – Linked youth to employment preparation workshops to learn job skills and take soft skills training. – Conducted résumé reviews.
VESID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Counselors conducted assessments, identified needs, tracked progress, and enrolled youth for VESID services.
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Coordinated training for staff on services available at One-Stop Centers and other services systems.
Adult agency providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provided youth with mentoring services, paid and unpaid work experiences, job development, job coaching, academic counseling and tutoring, benefits advisement and planning. – Assisted in connecting youth to other services and supports including General Equivalency Diploma (GED) classes, driver permits and parenting classes, as well as Medicaid Service Coordination.
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provided community-based work experiences, job tryouts, situational assessments, mentoring, internships, mock interviews, and job shadowing opportunities. – Organized career fairs for students with disabilities.
Employer Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provided youth with advice on workplace etiquette, disability disclosure and interview skills. – Worked with professionals to identify employment opportunities for youth as well as address issues related to securing and maintaining employment at the local level.
BOCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provided staff development and training to teachers and other professionals as well as transition planning services and vocational training supports.
Transition Coordination Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provided transition planning services. – Integrated information on students' employment needs in their IEPs. – Coordinated Transition Advisory Council activities and shared information that would enhance transition outcomes.

3.3.5. Partner roles

Various project partners provided a variety of services to youth with disabilities, and as Table 1 illustrates, project partners assumed various roles in project implementation.

In the thirty-month period, the demonstration sites facilitated linkages between adult service delivery systems and students with disabilities, including connecting youth to VESID and One-Stop Centers where they registered and accessed employment-related services and supports. Four of the demonstration sites, including two WIBs referred young adults to the disability program navigator stationed at One-Stop Centers to assist individuals with disabilities to better navigate through programs available at One-Stops Centers. As an additional resource to enhance career exploration and development, the disability program navigator facilitated access to employment resources, including orienting youth with disabilities to employment resources available at the centers, providing them with extensive job-search resources and referring them to employment preparation workshops where they could acquire job skills and develop their résumés. In addition to connecting youth to different systems, project sites trained teachers and other school professionals about service

delivery systems that provide transition services to individuals with disabilities such as the NYS Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) and One-Stop Centers summer youth programs that provide paid work experiences for eligible youth. Through the training, educators had greater awareness of adult services that are available to eligible youth with disabilities exiting the school system that are likely to enhance their transition outcomes.

As liaisons to employers, project sites advocated for job accommodations, modifications and training assistance, and helped youth obtain employment opportunities, including work tryouts, situational assessments, community-based work experiences and mentoring opportunities, internships, and job shadowing offered by employers. Through these opportunities, students developed functional skills necessary for employment. While there was some variation across demonstration sites with regard to how students were connected to community-based work experiences and other employment opportunities, in most cases, student interests were identified either through portfolios or career assessments prior to matching them with local businesses. Several community-based providers, including adult disability and other services agencies provided

job coaches. During the duration of the grant, students attended job fairs where they made connections with prospective employers, and, in some instances, obtained summer, after-school or full-time employment through these fairs. In addition, as part of the National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), the project sites raised awareness of young adult needs among employers that attended these events and also used these events to connect youth to potential employers. This resulted in internships or employment opportunities for some youth.

The demonstration projects provided the following employment-related services to youth with disabilities:

3.3.6. *Employment services*

During the duration of the grant, youth were connected to a variety of services systems, all of which provided employment-related services. The five project sites linked youth to One-Stop Centers and facilitated their enrollment for services. WIBs coordinated tours to One-Stop Centers where youth learned first hand about employment and completing WIA requirements. As One-Stop enrollees, youth were connected to employment resources, which allowed them to conduct job searches. Resources available at the One-Stop Centers, such as the NYS DOL internet-based career exploration and planning system, Career Zone, helped youth explore and identify a variety of prospective careers and the required skills. VESID referred eligible youth to appropriate services, including linking them to employment-related supports such as supported employment programs where they obtained employment skills. Youth were also provided with group in-class instruction on job readiness as well as other employment supports such as interviewing skills and employer expectations.

3.3.7. *Employment supports*

As part of their preparation for employment, adult provider agencies such as independent living centers provided training in interviewing skills, including conducting mock interviews with youth, and also addressed workplace etiquette, accommodations and disability disclosure. Youth employed at One-Stop youth department summer work sites and other employment sites were provided with individualized job coaching assistance. These supports enabled them to perform their job functions effectively, work with diverse groups, meet employer expectations and improve work performance. Youth were also paired one-on-one with mentors in a variety of occupations, including photographers, event

planners, chefs, graphic designers, veterinary assistants, librarians, office assistants, funeral assistants, auto mechanics, nurses, child care workers, teacher aides, guidance counselors, performing artists, among others, who shared their experiences about working in their respective fields and assisted youth in acquiring the requisite job skills for these professions. As part of NDEAM activities, youth participated in job shadowing activities during the disability-mentoring day, and in some cases, had the opportunity to acquire job skills.

3.3.8. *Career exploration*

Employers provided youth with opportunities to explore different careers. In some cases, employers provided customized employment opportunities and tailored job opportunities to the individual's needs. Some local businesses provided youth with work tryout opportunities as well as unpaid and paid employment, in lawn and garden stores, florist shops, restaurants and day care centers where they had hands-on experiences and acquired the skills needed for employment. In several instances, youth that started in unpaid positions were eventually offered paid employment.

3.3.9. *Soft skills*

Soft skills training was also offered to youth participating in these projects. Among the issues covered in the soft skills training were communication skills, interview and workplace attire, how to present themselves to employers, conflict resolution, work ethic and work habits to better prepare them to function effectively and meet the challenges of employment settings.

3.3.10. *Academic supports*

Among the academic supports provided to youth by several adult provider agencies were academic counseling and individualized tutoring, which enabled some youth to better prepare and sit for Regents exam graduation requirements.

3.3.11. *Other supports*

Benefits advisement and planning, including information on Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Medicare and Medicaid benefits, as well as assistance in accessing mental health services, housing and other services crucial to transition outcomes were offered to youth.

3.4. Project outcomes

The intended outcomes of the Partnerships For Youth demonstration projects were to increase the capacity of workforce development systems and their partners to provide youth with employment services and supports that would increase their employability upon exiting the school system.

This initiative increased awareness of the services provided by the workforce development and vocational rehabilitation systems among youth, their families and the professionals working with them in the school system. These projects' linkages with the One-Stop Centers were instrumental in providing youth with the requisite employment supports. In the thirty-month period, 457 students enrolled with One-Stop Centers. In one site, 60 youth that enrolled in the year-round WIA Employment & Training Youth Program gained access to employment resources specifically developed for youth, including assessments, counseling, supportive pre- and post-employment services and soft-skills workshops. The location of two demonstration sites at One-Stop Centers (a WIB and the adult provider agency) enhanced their ability to link youth to employment supports in a timely fashion. For instance, the adult provider agency whose staff was stationed at the One-Stop Center referred youth to the disability program navigator who assisted youth in accessing services essential for their employment goals, including providing youth with information on SSI, SSDI, benefits advisement and planning and workplace accommodations. Similarly, youth served at the WIB located at the One-Stop Center readily facilitated their access to resources available at the Center, including computers to conduct job searches and resources such as Career Zone.

Youth eligible for vocational rehabilitation were provided with guidance on how to access VESID services, including assistance in completing applications and enrolling for vocational supports essential for their employment-related goals. The WIB in Chemung County's preexisting partnership and familiarity with VESID not only enhanced referrals to VESID, but also enabled youth to access vocational services and supports readily. In addition, outreach conducted in area schools to raise awareness among teachers and other staff of services provided through the One-Stop Centers as well as tours of these Centers increased teachers' understanding of other services besides VESID, contributing to increased referrals and use of services available through these Centers by youth. Similarly,

information provided to youth and their families not only increased their awareness of the services provided by workforce development and vocational rehabilitation systems, but also helped them better navigate these systems.

Increased awareness among employers about the employment needs of youth with disabilities prompted some employers to carve out jobs for this population, which in turn, helped sharpen youth employment skills and increase their employability. The project sites, which acted as the first link to community employment and job development prior to their eligibility for publicly-funded vocational programs, referred youth with disabilities to community-based employers as well as county-funded employment and training programs. During the duration of this initiative, 2452 youth engaged in community-based work experiences, 342 were mentored and 203 transitioned to competitive employment, post-secondary education and other training. In addition, several school districts that were involved in these partnerships expanded work placements opportunities to include youth with disabilities, thereby providing them with skills needed for post-school employment. Moreover, the linkages between school districts and adult services providers not only increased these agencies awareness of community supports, but also enhanced their ability to better connect youth with resources essential to their transition. Similarly, the partnerships forged by workforce development systems and community-based organizations created linkages that were essential in identifying and providing additional youth employment transition services available through these entities. For example, as a result of this initiative, the WIB in Buffalo, which formed new partnerships with several community-based provider agencies, including the primary workforce youth provider in the county and other community-based employment providers that serve individuals with disabilities, became aware of other employment resources available through these agencies, thus enhancing the WIB's service provision.

4. Systemic barriers to transition for youth with disabilities

As the projects implemented these initiatives, they encountered systemic barriers that are likely to impact transition outcomes of youth with disabilities.

4.1. Workforce development systems

4.1.1. One-Stop Centers

Several issues in workforce development systems were cited as likely to adversely impact transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. As WIA implementation was underway, WIA educational guidelines were implemented, requiring the enrollment of youth that are likely to achieve a high school diploma or a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). The requirement to enroll youth that are likely to graduate with a GED, in particular, inadvertently led to the exclusion of young adults with disabilities, most of whom graduate with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) diploma. Because of this requirement, One-Stop Centers, which are required to meet performance standards to receive funding, were reluctant to enroll youth with disabilities, in particular, those with more severe disabilities in some of their employment programs, i.e. summer youth employment programs that provide paid work experiences. As a consequence, for a large number of youth participating in this initiative, especially those with more severe disabilities, could not obtain employment skills that would enhance their employment outcomes once they exit the school system. Similarly, the WIA program emphasis on enrolling students in the ninth grade or above precluded youth with a grade equivalency lower than the eighth grade from enrolling in WIA, again limiting youth with disabilities ability to obtain additional supports that could enhance their post-school employment outcomes.

Lack of consistency in the programs available across One-Stop Centers contributed to significant differences in the services and supports available to youth. For example, the year-round Employment and Training program at two One-Stop Centers had a significantly higher enrollment of youth with disabilities when compared to other Centers that enrolled youth in their summer employment programs. Moreover, discrepancies in access to services provided through the One-Stop Centers contributed to difficulties in scheduling appointments to visit and obtain services at some One-Stop Centers among youth. In addition, the location of One-Stop Centers in remote areas, which were not readily accessible by public transportation, precluded youth from obtaining services from these Centers. Also, the orientation of One-Stop Center services to adults as well as lack of experience in serving with youth, coupled with perception of youth as unreliable employees by some Center staff, not only limited youth utilization of the Centers, but also contributed to youth receiving less support at some Centers.

4.1.2. Vocational rehabilitation system

The vocational rehabilitation system involvement with a student during the final years of a student's high school career was deemed inadequate in providing supports that are likely to have a positive impact on student transition outcomes. Because students with disabilities require significant pre-vocational supports to enhance their vocational skills, by delaying the provision of these services until the last two years of high school, students failed to acquire the requisite skills potentially contributing to their inadequate preparation for the workforce. In addition, because the services and supports were provided too late in a student's high school career, they were inadequate in addressing their employment needs. In one demonstration site, which provided pre-vocational and vocational supports to youth ages 14–15, it was evident that by reaching youth at an earlier age, they were better prepared for employment. As a result of the feedback obtained from the demonstration projects on the inadequacy of providing supports to students with disabilities towards the end of their high school tenure, VESID issued a new policy stating that the vocational rehabilitation system will work with students, families and school districts to coordinate appropriate services in the last two years of high school or earlier, if appropriate [14].

4.1.3. Education system

Recent testing and other academic requirements implemented by the education system are likely to have a detrimental effect on student transition outcomes. Youth with disabilities lack supports to enable them to pass GED exams, contributing to a significant increase in the number of youth that cannot sit for the GED. In addition, lack of supports often undermines the ability of many GED enrollees, including out-of-school youth with significant learning disabilities to pass the exams, which potentially undermines their long-term transition outcomes and particularly their ability to obtain competitive employment.

Employment-related services and supports provided to students with disabilities by schools are not only limited but also vary widely across schools. There is considerable variation across schools in the development of career assessments and portfolios for students with disabilities that are used by employers to better identify employee skills and interests, and to determine appropriate placement. Similarly, vocational programs available through schools vary widely. During the duration of the grant, one school district's vocational program was retrenched as the staff oversee-

ing the program were assigned new duties. In other school districts' school-to-work programs, lack of essential employment-related supports such as job coaches or one-on-one supports limit students with disabilities' ability to acquire work skills. In addition, school districts also lack capacity and expertise in job development, which limits their ability to connect youth with resources that are likely to increase their success in employment.

In addition, lack of awareness about other service systems that provide transition services to individuals with disabilities among teachers, including how to access transition services from the vocational rehabilitation, employment, developmental disabilities, or mental health systems, impedes their ability to link students with disabilities to services that are essential for their post-school transition outcomes. In addition, teachers are often unaware of these systems' eligibility requirements, and in most cases, cannot readily identify students that may be eligible for services from these systems, which limits their ability to make appropriate referrals to these systems. Some teachers also lack knowledge of other services and supports such as SSI and Medicaid that may enhance transition into adulthood for youth with disabilities.

4.1.4. Non-employment-based systems

Several non-employment based programs provide supports that are available to eligible youth with disabilities and can facilitate their transition into the world of work. Some supports such as employment-related assistance that were previously available to out-of-school youth, are no longer available to them. Due to decrease in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding, youth with disabilities from low-income families who were previously eligible for time-limited assistance from the TANF program for employment-related supports can no longer access these funds. Also, community agencies' inability to provide employment-related assistance to out-of-school youth because of limited funding undermines their transition outcomes. Similarly, youth with learning disabilities and developmental disabilities that were slated to graduate with an IEP and are in need of intensive job coaching supports, are ineligible for supports that would enable them to participate in the summer TANF program. Also, youth with learning disabilities who are in need of service coordination but do not meet the OMRDD eligibility guidelines, cannot access these services from OMRDD.

5. Implications

WIA emphasis on collaboration and coordination by different systems has created opportunities for the workforce development system to better meet the needs and improve employment outcomes of a broad range of consumers. In addition, the implementation of the Disability Program Navigator (DPN) at One-Stop Centers ensures that services provided to persons with disabilities by these centers are tailored to meet their needs. However, barriers to serving individuals that use these centers, and particularly, those with developmental disabilities, have implications for transition outcomes for these youth.

5.1. Streamlining services in workforce development systems

Despite providing services and supports under one roof, the orientation of the One-Stop Center system toward adults presents challenges when serving youth with disabilities, which are compounded by insufficient disability program navigators in each county. Due to the program's unavailability in all NYS counties, One-Stop Center capacity to serve individuals with disabilities is limited. In addition to increasing the capacity of One-Stop Centers to ensure that their services are tailored to meet the employment needs that result in positive post-school outcomes for youth, there is a need to restructure One-Stop Centers to ensure that they are youth-friendly and easier for youth to navigate. Streamlining services at summer employment programs available at One-Stop Centers will ensure that youth have access to employment supports that will augment their employment skills. As several studies have documented, paid employment while the student is in high school will increase the likelihood of post-school success for students with disabilities [2,4]. Lack of uniformity in WIA performance standards for students with disabilities penalizes students with significant disabilities who are unlikely to meet these standards. To ensure that youth with disabilities benefit from One-Stop Centers as intended by WIA, the workforce development system needs to address how it can meet the unique needs of youth with disabilities without necessarily lowering performance standards set forth by WIA.

5.2. *Earlier provision of vocational rehabilitation services*

Providing vocational rehabilitation services to students earlier in high school to ensure that they have the services and supports that will lead to better transition outcomes is necessary. The new VESID policy on youth services in the last two years of high school (or earlier, if needed), is consistent with what existing accounts have demonstrated, that is, that students that receive vocational supports while in school have better employment outcomes [4]. By providing youth with disabilities with employment supports at an earlier age, youth are likely to be better prepared for post-school employment.

5.3. *Greater collaboration among service systems*

As this demonstration illustrated, collaboration and coordination between systems resulted in positive employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. There is a need for greater collaboration between the workforce development, vocational rehabilitation, and the education system to ensure that the needs of youth with disabilities are addressed. Schools need to be better informed about where to refer youth with disabilities for services and supports, such as job development and community work experiences that are not available within the education system. Greater collaboration between workforce, vocational rehabilitation, and education systems will not only ensure that professionals are aware of services, but are also apprised of developments that may impact on student transition. As an example, continuing collaboration with teachers, One-Stop Centers and vocational rehabilitation services will ensure that teachers are better informed about services and supports in these systems, possibly enhancing their ability to conduct appropriate referrals to various systems.

5.4. *Provision of services and supports*

Increasing the availability of services and supports that are likely to enhance transition outcomes is necessary. In the absence of supports available through some services systems, youth need to be informed about alternative resources that they can access to bridge the gap in supports and in so doing, minimize the impact on their transition outcomes. For instance, where there is a lack of GED supports through the education system, youth need to be aware of community agencies that provide similar or complementary services.

6. Conclusion

As the outcomes of this initiative illustrate, the establishment of partnerships increased the capacity of different systems to provide employment transition services that will improve the employability of youth with disabilities post-school. In recognizing the viability of the partnerships approach, the New York State Education Department, of which VESID is a part, is implementing a statewide Model Transition Program (MTP) on school-to-work transition comprising a variety of partners, including high schools, local vocational rehabilitation providers, colleges, universities, community-based agencies such as independent living centers and the business community to improve services available through the vocational rehabilitation system that will help youth with disabilities transition from school to employment or continuing education. Despite demonstrating some positive outcomes for youth with disabilities, the PFY initiative also revealed systemic barriers that may impact on the transition outcomes of youth with disabilities, including lack of consistency in service provision across One-Stop Centers as well as barriers in coordination and collaboration with other workforce development systems, thereby impeding seamless service delivery as envisioned by WIA.

To determine the long-term impact of partnerships on the employment outcomes of youth, further research needs to be undertaken. Among the issues that can be explored include tracking youth and their use of services provided by One-Stop Centers once they transition from school to determine how these services impact on transition. Similarly, tracking the long-term employment outcomes of youth with disabilities involved in these initiatives to determine post-school outcomes may help identify what makes for successful transition. Besides tracking post-school employment outcomes, it would also be useful to investigate other areas related to transition such as youth independent living outcomes. Regrettably, these issues were beyond the scope of this demonstration grant.

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