

TO: Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services
Directors of Private Approved Special Education Facilities
Directors of Charter Schools

FROM: George P. Dowaliby, Chief
Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services

DATE: June 28, 2002

SUBJECT: Update #29

As the 2001-2002 school year comes to a close, I encourage all of you to reflect on the accomplishments during the past year on behalf of students with disabilities and their families by you and your staff, and to look forward to meeting the challenges in the coming new year. Your contributions are critical as we move to continue to improve outcomes for all students in Connecticut.

URGENT REQUEST FOR INFORMATION FOR CSPD PERSONNEL SHORTAGE WORK GROUP:

The CSPD Council has charged a work group to study personnel shortages in the areas of special education (including early childhood) and speech and language pathology and to make recommendations regarding recruitment/retention strategies. Your help is urgently needed, as the work group has to submit its report to the CSPD council in July. Please email or call Carolyn Isakson as soon as possible if your district has developed useful/promising practices in personnel recruitment/retention in general and for the aforementioned shortage areas in particular, as well as about the numbers of Speech-Language Pathology Assistants you are using to support the delivery of speech and language services in your district. Email is preferable at Carolyn.isakson@po.state.ct.us. You may call Carolyn at (860) 807-2046. Thanks for your cooperation on such short notice. The work group is dealing with a very short turn around time for the report.

AUTISM SUMMER INSTITUTE: JULY 29, 30 AND 31:

The intense three-day program, led by consultants from Benhaven, is designed for elementary and middle school teams. Teams must include a general education teacher who is expecting a student with autism spectrum disorders in their classroom at the start of the 2002-2003 school year and either a special educator, speech & language pathologist, paraprofessional or school psychologist. To facilitate participation around planning for the needs of a specific child with ASD the completion of a mandatory "pre-assignment" is required, which will include: interviews of staff currently supporting the child and completion of a questionnaire. Please direct all inquiries to Debbie O'Connor, Project Assistant with SERC, (860) 632-1485, ext. 225.

CLOSING OUT FEDERALLY-FUNDED PROGRAMS WHICH END ON JUNE 30, 2002:

Your district will have some federally-funded programs which will end on June 30, 2002. All grant funding for those programs must be expended or encumbered by June 30, 2002. If you encumber funding as of June 30, 2002, you will have until August 30, 2002 to liquidate all funding related to that program.

Program Audits, FTEs, Time and Cost Records

Since IDEA-Part B grant awards have increased significantly in the past few years, the number of audits of IDEA-Part B grants has increased. A key factor auditors look for is that a district undergoing audit can provide documentation that time and cost records relating to a person hired with grant funding substantiate the activities of such a person. Stated differently, if a district is approved for and receives grant funding for a 0.6 FTE speech therapist, then that district must be able to demonstrate that the speech therapist actually spent 0.6 FTE of their time providing services as approved in the grant application and that expenditures made from grant funding matched that level of services provided. If the time and cost records do not match, there will be an audit exception. The caution in this is that districts (a) utilize personnel approved in grant applications in the manner described in the application and (b) they maintain good cost and time records relating to such personnel.

REVIEW TEAM VOLUNTEERS:

The Bureau plans to conduct, during the 2002-03 school year, reviews of at least ten private special education programs that have requested approval from the State Board of Education. The review process includes a one-day site visit by a review team that includes a representative of a public school district and a representative of an approved private special education program.

Please contact Art Carey (860-807-2032 *or* art.carey@po.state.ct.us) if you would like to serve as a member of a review team.

TEACHERS MORTGAGE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM:

The Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA) has a low-interest rate mortgage program for certain Connecticut certified full-time and part-time public school “teachers” who are first time home buyers (or haven’t had an ownership interest in a principal residence during the past three years). “Certain teachers” includes those working in priority or transitional districts or in designated shortage areas. Teachers employed by a priority or transitional district must purchase a home in that district. Teachers working in shortage areas as identified by the State Department of Education (SDE) may purchase statewide. The SDE annually identifies shortage areas. Current areas of shortage for this program that are of interest include comprehensive special education, preK-12 and speech and language pathology. There is also a down payment assistance program. Information about these programs will be useful to both new applicants to your district as well as your existing staff. For more information, contact CHFA at (860) 571-3502 or visit the agency’s website at www.chfa.org.

IDENTIFICATION OF OTHER HEALTH IMPAIRMENT/AD(H)D BY PLANNING AND PLACEMENT TEAMS:

The recent passage of Public Act 01-124 Concerning Recommendations For and Refusal of the Use of Psychotropic Drugs by Children has generated questions about whether a Planning and Placement Team (PPT) can identify a student as qualifying for special education and related services under the other health impairment/AD(H)D category.

The Act does not contradict or supersede the current status of the PPT with regard to identifying a child as having other health impairment. As stated in the State Department of Education memo issued on January 4, 1993:

“Section 300.532(a) of the Federal regulations requires that a child’s evaluation must be conducted by a multidisciplinary team (PPT) including at least one teacher or other specialist with knowledge in the area of suspected disability. Based on this requirement, public agencies must ensure that the PPT determining a child’s eligibility under any category includes an individual with knowledge in the area of the suspected disability. If a PPT believes that a medical evaluation by a licensed physician is needed as part of the evaluation to determine whether a child suspected of having AD(H)D or any other medical condition meets the eligibility requirements of one of the categories of exceptionality under the IDEA or Connecticut General Statutes, the school district must ensure that this evaluation is conducted and is at no cost to parents. However, if a school district believes there are other effective methods for determining whether a child suspected of having AD(H)D or any other medical condition meets the eligibility requirements under the IDEA, Part B, then it would be permissible to use other qualified personnel to conduct the evaluation.”

A PPT that includes team members with the appropriate expertise can make this eligibility determination. Good practice would call for routine inclusion of a school nurse in this decision-making process. Whether or not input from a physician is required would best be determined on a case-by-case basis. If, however, a school district has a policy of always requiring a medical evaluation to consider OHI/AD(H)D as a suspected disability, the cost of the medical evaluation is the responsibility of the school district.

As per the SDE memo quoted above, nothing in P.A. 01-124 eliminates the authority and responsibility of the PPT to recommend a medical evaluation as part of an initial evaluation or reevaluation in order to determine a child's eligibility for special education or educational needs for an IEP.

Similarly, P.A. 01-124 does not restrict current scope of practice for school mental health professionals and other educators who have appropriate training and expertise in assessing student behavior, planning and monitoring behavioral interventions, and consulting with parents and school staff about student behavior, except for the prohibition against recommending use of stimulant medication.

REVISED IEP:

The Bureau will shortly be releasing a revised IEP and Manual to school districts in order to further assist them in complying with the IEP requirements included in the 1997 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), advised the states that all IEPs written on or after July 1, 1998, must comply with the requirements of the IDEA 97. Additionally, the Bureau has taken this opportunity to implement comments and recommendations that have been collected over the past few years from districts regarding improvements to the forms.

The position of the Bureau is that these IEP forms serve a number of purposes. Besides complying with the statutory requirements of IDEA and State Law, the forms assist as a data collection and student educational program-planning tool. In anticipation of the release of the IEP early this summer, districts will be expected to begin using the new forms by November 1, 2002.

If you have any questions regarding the IEP forms or wish to discuss the implementation timeline, please contact Jeffrey Forman, Connecticut State Department of Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457. (e-mail: Jeff.Forman@po.state.ct.us.)

LEARNING MEDIA ASSESSMENT (LMA) FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED, TO RESPOND TO PAGE 5, QUESTION #14 ON THE IEP FORM:

This is to alert you to the importance of having a Learning Media Assessment conducted annually for all students who are blind or visually impaired to be sure that they are receiving instruction in the appropriate media. It is the responsibility of the teacher of the visually impaired in your district (or BESB Education Consultant) to complete the LMA for every visually impaired student and report the results at the time of the annual review. This assessment may take up to two hours the first time it is given to a child, but does not take long to update each year after that. Administration of this assessment is designed to insure that children who require Braille instruction for current or future needs receive it. In addition, children with impaired vision are assessed for appropriateness of instructional print size, and other learning tools, including books on tape and adapted technology. The LMA is also designed for administration to preschool children and students with severe multiple disabilities to assess sensory learning channels. All students with a vision disability, regardless of age or severity of disabilities, (unless they are currently being instructed in Braille) should be given the LMA each year.

Most teachers of the visually impaired have received instruction in how to administer the Learning Media Assessment developed by Koenig and Holbrook. The handbook can be obtained from the Texas School for the Blind (www.tsbvi.org). A free workshop in how to conduct the LMA is being offered by the Board of Education and Services for the Blind on February 5, 1:00-3:00p.m. For more information, contact Marybeth Dean at 860-602-4180.

USE OF THE TERM EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE (ED):

This is to clarify any confusion that may have resulted from the use of the term emotional disturbance (abbreviated as ED) on ISSIS forms and in the upcoming revision of the SDE recommended IEP form. The term serious emotional disturbance was established in state statute in 1995, thereby paralleling the term used in federal special education law (IDEA). In the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, the term serious emotional disturbance was used in the first reference, along with the parenthetical statement “hereinafter referred to as ‘emotional disturbance’).

Further clarification is provided in the supplemental commentary to the IDEA regulations issued in March, 1999, with the following quote from the Senate and House committee reports on P.L. 105-17 (IDEA '97):

The Committee wants to make clear that changing the terminology from “serious emotional disturbance” to “serious emotional disturbance [hereinafter referred to as ‘emotional disturbance’]” in the definition of a “child with a disability” is intended to have no substantive or legal significance. It is intended strictly to eliminate the pejorative connotation of the term “serious.” It should in no circumstances be construed to change the existing meaning of the term under 34 CFR 300.7(b)(9).

These terms should be regarded in the same manner in Connecticut, that is, that emotional disturbance (ED) adequately describes the condition, and the two terms can be used interchangeably at the discretion of the school district.

INJURY FROM RESTRAINT OR SECLUSION:

P. A. 99-210 (An Act Concerning Physical Restraint of Persons with Disabilities) requires that each regional education service center, and each facility or institution which provides special education services on behalf of a local or regional board of education, report to the Commissioner of Education any incident in which the use of physical restraint or seclusion results in physical injury to a student. This written report must include:

1. The name of the student,
2. The nature of the emergency that necessitated the use of the restraint or seclusion,
3. A description of the restraint or seclusion, and
4. A description of the injury to the student.

The report should be forwarded, within two business days of the incident, to Art Carey of the Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services.

At this time, the Department of Education is not mandating a specific format for this reporting. (A legible copy of an internal "incident report" which contains each of the elements listed above is sufficient.) However, the Department is making available a form (enclosed), developed by the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, which may be used to meet the reporting requirements.

Please note that in the event that a report contains information regarding a serious injury or death, the Bureau will share the information with the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities and, if appropriate, with the Office of Child Advocate. **In the event that a report does not contain all required information, the Bureau will share the incomplete report with the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities rather than inadvertently delay the work of that agency.**

With regard to a definition of "serious injury," the Department is using the same definition that is currently being used by the Department of Children and Families. Specifically, *"serious injury shall mean any physical harm, injury, or damage requiring the intervention of a physician or licensed medical professional, utilizing medical procedures more intensive than first aid treatment, including but not limited to: treatment in an emergency room, sutures, fractures, head traumas of a concussion level or greater, or admission to a general hospital for the treatment of a serious injury. This would also include severe, multiple contusions, bruises and abrasions, and a loss of consciousness requiring examination by a licensed medical practitioner. It would also apply to injuries as a result of the use of seclusion or restraints or while a person is going into or out of seclusion or restraint."*

Please call Mr. Carey at 860-807-2032 if you have any questions regarding this matter.

TRANSITION PLANNING:

Follow-Up Study of Exiters of Special Education:

A part of the Bureau's Self-Assessment and Continuous Improvement Planning process, an initial activity in the area of transition planning was to obtain baseline data on post-schools outcomes of special education students. Thank you for providing the names, addresses and phone numbers of your students who exited special education from January – June 2000. Approximately 3,700 surveys have been mailed out. A final report will be completed by October 2002 and provide a summary of the employment, independent living and community participation status of the respondents. The results of the survey will be shared with you upon completion.

Transition Program Status Survey:

An additional activity directly related to the Bureau's Self-Assessment and Continuous Improvement Planning Process, is to establish a baseline of the current status of transition programming in all LEA's and Private Special Education facilities. A survey was recently mailed to you to obtain information on the types and levels of transition planning components currently being offered in your schools. It is recommended that a team of personnel complete this survey to capture the transition services that are currently being offered to students with varying disabilities.

The Bureau recognizes the extensive activities that are occurring at this time of year, but respectfully requests your full support and participation in completing the survey. The result of the survey will not only serve as a self-assessment to assist you in identifying strengths and weaknesses in your current

transition service provision, but also guide the Bureau's future activities in the area of transition training, technical assistance and allocation of discretionary funds.

A summary report will be completed by October 2002 and the results of the survey will be shared with you upon completion.

Transition Coordinator and Job Coach Competencies:

The Bureau often receives calls from LEA's to provide them with job descriptions of Transition Coordinators and Job Coaches. A subcommittee of the state-level Interagency Transition Task Force recently completed a list of competencies they believe are critical when defining the roles of these two positions. Copies of the competencies are enclosed with this Update.

"Best Practice" Recommendation:

The Bureau has received an increasing number of calls from young adults and adults with learning disabilities seeking information on how to obtain evaluations and documentation of their disabilities. Many of these individuals had received special education services while in high school, but had decided not to carry this "label" with them into adulthood. Years later, after facing failure in postsecondary education settings and losing numerous jobs, they are beginning to recognize their need for accommodations and support. In order to obtain documentation of their disability, they often return to their high schools for any evaluations that had been conducted. In many instances, this occurs years after a school system can legally destroy this type of information. Exacerbating this problem, many of these individuals do not have the financial means to obtain any type of evaluation to document their disability.

In an attempt to better address this increasing problem, the Bureau recommends that students be provided with copies of their most recent evaluations at the point in time they are exiting special education. Students should be encouraged to retain this information in a safe place and be provided with an explanation of the potential need for this documentation in the future.

For any questions related to these transition planning issues, contact Karen Halliday at (860) 807-2020 or karen.halliday@po.state.ct.us

JOB COACH COMPETENCIES FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS IN SCHOOL SYSTEMS:

Adapted from Supported Employment Competencies for Direct Service Staff (APSE)

Students with disabilities who receive training and support at a variety of job sites during high school are better prepared for a successful transition to the working world. The job coach is the key person who is responsible for knowing the student, and the supports and modifications needed to be successful in the workplace. The job coach must create a safe environment in which the student can explore and learn work, interpersonal and self-advocacy skills.

The job coach represents the school and serves as the liaison between the employment site, the school, the student and parents. A diverse but critical array of competencies is required of the job coach, including good judgment and the ability to maintain professional behavior at all times.

Job coaches will demonstrate the knowledge to accomplish the following:

- 1) Ability to work effectively and maintain relationships with families, students, school personnel and employers and co-workers:
 - a) Gathers and maintains data about the performance and behavior of individual students and confer with special and general education teachers about student schedules, instructional goals, progress and performance;
 - b) Participates as a member of the team responsible for transition planning and vocational assessment for individual students;
 - c) Provides relevant employment information for inclusion in each student's vocational portfolio;
 - d) Consults with teachers or vocational coordinators to assist with the design of individualized transition and supported employment or other vocational training programs;
 - e) Demonstrates an understanding regarding the roles and responsibilities of professional and paraprofessional personnel;
 - f) Communicates effectively with employers and co-workers to ensure students are integrated and accepted into the work environment;
 - g) Familiarizes employers and co-workers with the special needs of students and models appropriate interactions; and
 - h) Identifies cultural norms of the workplace.
- 2) Knowledge of the professional, ethical and legal standards of conduct in relationships with students, parents, school personnel, adult service providers, employers and co-workers:
 - a) Has knowledge of the legal and human rights of students with disabilities and their families;
 - b) Is sensitive to the diversity in cultural heritage, lifestyles, and value systems among students and families they serve;
 - c) Demonstrates the ability to practice the ethical and professional standards of conduct established by the local school district where they work;
 - d) Understands the value of serving students in integrated settings; and
 - e) Maintains professional appearance and attitude.
3. Skills necessary to assist in the assessment, planning, provision, and evaluation of instruction in both the cognitive and affective domains:
 - a) Communicates with colleagues, follows instructions and uses problem-solving and other skills that will enable them to work as effective members of an instructional team;

- b) Motivates and assists students to build self-esteem and develop interpersonal skills that will help avoid isolation in the workplace;
 - c) Demonstrates the ability to use computers, assistive technology, and adaptive equipment that will enable students to participate more fully in school and at the workplace;
 - d) Demonstrates the ability to participate in pre-employment, vocational, or transition training in classrooms or at the workplace;
 - e) Analyzes job requirements, sequences daily tasks, observes and records data, and provides training at job sites using appropriate instructional interventions;
 - f) Encourages student participation in decision-making/self-advocacy regarding future career plans;
 - g) Observes, understands, and monitors the student's preferred learning style, work skills and tolerances, and preferred modes of communication;
 - h) Identifies needed environmental or job modifications for the student to succeed in the workplace;
 - i) Utilizes appropriate instructional techniques including reinforcement, cueing, prompting, modeling and fading;
 - j) Assists in on-site observations to evaluate job performance;
 - k) Records progress in a consistent manner and shares information with appropriate supervisory personnel; and
 - l) Assists students to learn good work habits and perform jobs as specified.
4. Recognizes and maintains a safe and healthy environment at the workplace:
- a) Follows health, safety and emergency procedures developed by the local school district and the workplace; and
 - b) Ensures students understand and abide by the health, safety and emergency procedures developed by the local school district and the workplace.
5. Demonstrates the skills in communication, conflict resolution and negotiation that facilitate a positive and effective work environment:
- a) Assists students in strengthening their skills to become more independent by monitoring and supporting positive behavior at the workplace;
 - b) Describes behavior in measurable and observable terms;
 - c) Recognizes environmental factors that may precipitate behaviors and intervenes with appropriate behavior management techniques;
 - d) Develops strategies to support students to acquire positive social behaviors and work habits;
 - e) Identifies strategies that may eliminate interfering behaviors; and
 - f) Motivates students to work in a productive and competitive manner.

COMPETENCIES FOR TRANSITION COORDINATORS:

Adapted from Council on Exceptional Children – DCDT

Planning for the transition from school to adult life for students with disabilities requires a well-defined vision that is agreed upon by the student, his/her family, school personnel and agency personnel. The Transition Coordinator plays a critical role in facilitating the transition process. In addition to being the primary liaison among the school, business community and agency personnel, the Transition Coordinator provides direct service to assist young adults assess their learning strengths, articulate career goals, provide community-based career planning options and link students to post high school support systems. Transition Coordinators are important members of the Planning and Placement Teams and should guide the PPT discussion to address post-school outcomes and develop IEP's that will provide the skills needed to achieve independence in adult life.

Student Focused Planning

- Identify and document student's post-school goals, learning preferences, and need for accommodations.
- Facilitate a student-centered plan focusing on student visions and preferences.
- Use a variety of assessment information as a basis for the development of the Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Identify measurable transition-related goals and objectives that focus on post-secondary education or training, employment, independent living, and community and leisure activities.
- Develop educational experiences that correspond with post-school goals and objectives, such as participation in college preparatory curricula and/or vocational and technical education.
- Through the IEP, specify responsibility for transition-related instructional activities or services.
- Develop student's abilities to participate meaningfully in the development of the IEP.
- Utilize a planning process that is student-centered and facilitates student's self-determination, including student decision-making.
- Provide appropriate accommodations that facilitate student and family involvement in the transition planning process, and specifically at the PPT meeting.
- Evaluate the progress or attainment of student goals at least annually, including student evaluation of her or her progress.

Knowledge And Skills Of Transition Coordinators

1. Philosophical, Historical, & Legal Foundations of Special Education

Knowledge of:

- Theoretical and applied models of transition.
- Transition-related legislation in fields of special and vocational education, rehabilitation, labor and civil rights.
- Roles of federal, state and local legislation and implications for providing transition services at the local levels.
 - History of national transition initiatives.
 - Research on student outcomes and effective transition practices.

2. Characteristics of Learners

Knowledge of:

- Implications of student characteristics (i.e. strengths abilities, disabilities), with respect to post-school outcomes, environments, and support needs.
- School and post-school services available to specific populations of students with disabilities.

3. Assessment, Diagnosis, and Evaluation

Knowledge of:

- Formal and informal career and vocational assessment approaches.
- Formal and informal approaches for identifying students' interests and preferences related to post-school goals and educational experiences.

Demonstrates the ability to:

- Match skills and interests of the students to skills and demands required by vocational or employment settings, community residential situation, and other community participation options.
- Interpret results of career and vocational assessment for individuals, families and professionals.
- In collaboration with students, families, and agencies, design, implement, and use program evaluation procedures to assess and improve the effectiveness of transition education and services, including evaluation of students' post-school outcomes.
- Use a variety of formal and informal career, and transition, and vocational assessment procedures.

4. Instructional Content and Practice

Knowledge of:

- Job seeking and job retention skills identified by employers as essential for successful employment.
- Vocational education methods, models, and curricula.
- Range of post-school options within specific outcomes areas.
- Transition planning strategies that facilitate information collection and input from appropriate participants.

Demonstrates the ability to:

- Identify a variety of outcomes and instructional options specific to the community for each post-school outcome area.
- Assist teachers to identify, in conjunction with the student, appropriate educational program planning team members.
- Evaluate students' educational program with respect to measurable post-school goals and alignment of those goals with instructional activities.
- Monitor student, family, and agency participation in transition-related goals in the educational program plan.

- Evaluate and modify transition goals on an ongoing basis.
- Use interests and preferences of the student to develop post-school goals and educational objectives.

5. Planning and Managing the Teaching and Learning Environment

Knowledge of:

- Methods for providing work-based and other community-based education for students.
- Job development strategies and how to market the school to the community.
- Methods for linking appropriate academic curricula to transition-related goals.

Demonstrates the ability to:

- Develop a marketing plan to identify employers in the community based upon student interests and abilities.
- Identify and facilitate appropriate modifications within work, residential, vocational training and other community environments.
- Assess and develop natural support systems to facilitate transition to specific post-school environments.
- Develop residential, work-based, and other community-based educational programs for students.

6. Managing Student Behavior and Social Interaction Skills

Demonstrates the ability to:

- Show procedures for student involvement in the post-school transition process.

7. Communication and Collaborative Partnership

Knowledge of:

- Methods and strategies for increasing families' knowledge and skills about transition-related issues and topics, including transition-focused educational program development.
- Procedures and requirements for referring students to community service agencies.
- Methods to increase collaborative transition service delivery through interagency agreements and collaborative funding.
- Strategies for involving students in all levels of collaborative transition program planning and evaluation.

Demonstrates the ability to:

- Provide information to families about transition-related education and services, and post-school options in specific outcome areas.
- Systematically identify family service needs related to transition outcomes and assist families to connect with support networks.
- Involve student, families, and community agencies in establishing transition-related policy.

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- Assess and use student support systems (i.e. families, friends) to facilitate the post-school transition of students.
- Provide transition-focused technical assistance and professional development in collaboration with family members for educators, community agency personnel, and other relevant transition stakeholders.
- Collaborate with and participate in transition-focused interagency coordinating bodies.
- Develop coordinated interagency strategies to collect, share, and use student assessment data, with appropriate input and authorization of students and families.

8. Professionalism and Ethical Practices

Knowledge of:

- Scope and role of a Transition Specialist.
- Scope and role of agency personnel related to transition-focused education and services.

Demonstrates the ability to:

- Demonstrate positive regard for the capacity and operating constraints of community organizations involved in transition-focused education and services.

May 2002

GPD:g
Enclosures

cc: Theodore S. Sergi, Commissioner of Education
George A. Coleman, Associate Commissioner of Education
Edward Preneta, Council on Developmental Disabilities
Bonnie Moran, Special Education Advisory Council
Nancy Prescott, CT Advocacy Center
Superintendents of Schools
Hearing Officers
SDE Staff