

Prioritizing Family Involvement in Transition

Overview

Youth and family involvement in the transition plan are important components of a successful plan. Family support is a powerful, preventive mechanism that supports youth resiliency¹ and has a significant impact on the successful reentry of youth in the corrections system back to their homes and communities. However, many parents of youth in correctional facilities often are not fully involved in their child's education;² this sometimes results from not getting sufficient or understandable information about the overall juvenile justice process.³ In addition, life stressors (e.g., financial or employment concerns, marital or relational issues, and transportation-related issues) often affect parents' ability to participate in the education of their youth.⁴ Such barriers can hinder parental involvement with the juvenile justice system.

For youth with disabilities in correctional facilities, it also is important to ensure that families understand their legal rights and obligations and know how to navigate the logistical challenges that may arise during involvement with the juvenile justice system.⁵ Correctional facilities can help address barriers by (1) offering parent education programs focused on the juvenile justice process (including transition and reentry), (2) facilitating communication to promote parental participation, (3) improving intake forms to ensure the most up-to-date information is gathered, and (4) recognizing the barriers that exist so that parental involvement can be prioritized and tailored to specific needs.⁶ Further, involving families in transition planning from the onset of a youth's entry into a correctional facility can support the development of more comprehensive plans that encompass the needs of families and those of youth. Engaging youth with disabilities and their families in transition planning should integrate the use of self-assessments along with need, preference, and interest assessment data, which can be factored into goal creation and planning for postsecondary outcomes within an individualized education program (IEP).^{7,8}

Key Principles of Practice

The following principles were identified in a review of *Transition Toolkit 2.0: Meeting the Educational Needs of Youth Exposed to the Juvenile Justice System*⁹ and *Parental Involvement Practices of Juvenile Courts: Report to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*.¹⁰

Involving Families in Decision-Making Processes Surrounding Transition Research has consistently shown that the education of youth with disabilities becomes more effective when families have meaningful opportunities to participate in a youth's education in both school and home and if the roles and responsibilities of parents or guardians are strengthened.¹¹ For youth with disabilities in correctional facilities, family involvement may best be leveraged during the development or revision (if warranted) of a youth's IEP that includes an individualized transition plan (ITP). Correctional facilities can best promote successful transition and reentry of youth back to home, school, and community by involving youth and their families in decision-making processes. For some youth, especially those in foster care, surrogate caregivers may be identified to participate in educational and transition planning.¹² At the point of a youth's entry into a correctional facility, the facility should prioritize the identification of the correct person to involve (e.g., custodial parent, noncustodial guardian, or surrogate) in decisions related to a youth's IEP, educational

placement within the facility, and the transition or reentry plan. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) lays out several parental rights that facilities and reentry agencies must comply with:

- The right to participate in meetings related to the evaluation, assessment, and educational placement of their youth.
- The right to participate in meetings about providing a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to their youth, even while in detention.
- The right to review all educational and evaluative records.
- The right to be members of teams that decide whether their youth meets the eligibility criteria for special education and related services.
- The right to be members of the team that develops or revises a youth's IEP, including ITPs.

Parental involvement is not simply notification of decisions; rather, it is critical that parents be actively involved in and supportive of education and transition goals. Coordination with parents and families can help IEPs and ITPs be successful, and, conversely, their lack of agreement or involvement can substantially hinder plan effectiveness.¹³ Care must be taken to provide supports in a culturally competent and respectful manner¹⁴ (as well as in a manner that is respectful and ensures that parents have a firm understanding of their rights and the potential impact of their decisions on their child).^{15,16} The effective involvement of families also leads to more success in transitioning youth back to their home and community after release.

Leveraging Technology to Involve Parents Involving families in the decision-making processes related to transition and reentry often can pose a challenge at the correctional facility level. In many instances, facilities are located outside the communities where youths' families reside. For families who reside at a distance from facilities or who have transportation issues, attending transition or reentry coordination meetings in person may prove challenging. If it is not possible for parents of youth with disabilities to participate in person, IDEA mandates that the school or institution leverage technology to involve parents. Examples of these technologies include conference calls, video conferencing, Web-based meetings, and computer-assisted IEP development systems (CAIDS).^{17,18} In addition, facilities also may consider using technology to overcome other potential logistical barriers, such as cultural and language barriers¹⁴ or working around employment requirements.¹⁹ As transition and reentry goals are identified for youth with disabilities, those goals may be entered into an online platform (e.g., Blackboard or e-IEP technology) that parents and families can access to monitor their youth's progress. Families also might leverage similar technologies to identify where in a transition curriculum sequence their youth is participating.

This topical brief focuses primarily on family involvement and engagement within transition and reentry; however, many of these practices also can be applied to other domains (e.g., educational, facility-wide, and community practice). For additional resources to support family engagement, please visit <http://osepideasthatwork.org/jj/family-involvement>.

This document was retrieved from a Web-based resource on the topic of juvenile corrections. For more information and additional resources, please visit <http://osepideasthatwork.org/jj>.

Endnotes

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