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**Statement of the Council for Exceptional Children  
Division on Career Development and Transition**

**Submitted to the  
Interagency Committee on Disability Research Public Meeting  
August 5, 2008**

The Council for Exceptional Children-Division on Career Development and Transition (CEC-DCDT) is pleased to have this opportunity to provide suggestions to the ICDR on ways to improve future research for individuals with disabilities. DCDT welcomes ICDR's review of research priorities, and the opportunity for public input.

The Division of Career Development and Transition (DCDT) promotes national and international efforts to improve the quality of and access to career/vocational and transition services, increase the participation of education in career development and transition goals and to influence policies affecting career development and transition services for persons with disabilities. DCDT is a division of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes for individuals with exceptionalities, students with disabilities, and/or the gifted.

Both CEC and DCDT support professionals, families, and all others working on behalf of individuals with exceptionalities; advocate for the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals; **advance research and evidence-based practice**; advocate for appropriate governmental policies; set professional standards; provide continuing professional development; and help professionals achieve conditions and access resources necessary for effective special education professional practice. Both CEC and DCDT believe that further research is needed for children, ages birth – 21, not just school-age children; and that **research should include social and transition skills**.

**Issue: Effective Coordination/Integration of Research**

DCDT recognizes the inherent value of research priorities that, when braided together, will bring our disability fields closer to providing improved and statistically valid outcomes for our young adult constituencies that they may have a meaningful, independent life in their communities. Through today's efforts that critically assess the broad and critical issues challenging effective coordination and integration among diverse research partners, we look forward to coordinated leading-edge research with true potential to not only describe, but also achieve the goals inherent in *New Freedom*.

**Assessment of gap/duplication**

Research and dissemination of results need to move beyond an agency's niche. Current research falls short in the following areas:

- Interagency information sharing that promotes collaboration in not only research, but also cross-agency program development
- Longitudinal, cross age, and cross-field research and development that result in sustained program improvement
- Longitudinal and short term studies within the education field (as authorized under NCLB) that fail to take into consideration students with disabilities as part of its sample frame
- Surveys and/or case studies across all agencies and/or departments do not include or are incapable of disaggregating data to meaningfully inform about subpopulations with disabilities (e.g. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems, and various state's postschool outcomes evaluations)
- Research and data collection in other fields that take into consideration individuals with disabilities as part of its sample frame
- Research that addresses diversity (particularly linguistic, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic)
- National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Centers has not found any evidence-based practices in the area of family Involvement
- Longitudinal studies need to look at the postschool outcomes related to programs and practices

### **DCDT's Recommendations:**

1. Promote and increase coordinated studies between agencies that allows for pooling, sharing and/or matching funding, produces joint dissemination of results, application designed to inform multiple agencies about shared best practices
2. Promote and increase funding for research that examines general populations to include within its sample frame individuals with disabilities and diversity (linguistic, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic)
3. Promote and increase funding for research that provides evidence-based practices in the area of family involvement
4. Promote and increase funding for research longitudinal studies need that examine postschool outcomes related to programs and practices
5. Promote and increase funding for longitudinal studies that inform how the agencies that intersect the lives of children and adults with disabilities form working, coordinated, and collaborative relationships to the benefit of positive outcomes for these individuals
6. Increase funding for longitudinal and coordinated interagency research that informs effective practices for replication of future outcomes

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## **Issue: Research that Leads to Ready to Use Evidence Based Practice**

Within our field of education, federal mandates compels teachers to use research and evidence-based practices in their classrooms, even though the special education field has not yet determined the criteria for evidence based practice, nor whether special education has a solid foundation of evidence-based practices. We are also concerned that teachers have difficulty accessing teaching strategies that have been researched.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), currently referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), requires our teachers to be highly qualified, well versed in research and skilled in moving research-to-practice. Good research is systematic, logical, empirical, and replicable. Practioners need to have their fingers on the pulse of research results, be able to wrap their arms around it, and be able to apply it to the students, clients, customers with disabilities they serve.

### **Assessment of gap/duplication**

Current research falls short in the following areas:

- Demonstration research projects do not provide and sustain solutions for improved practices beyond the duration of the research project
- Results of studies languish on dusty shelves or are buried in the virtual pages of the internet with no hope for direct and immediate application by the teacher, therapist, or other service provider
- Research Project evaluations need to include follow-up studies that encourage and sustain results
- Knowledge of and access to the creative ways special educators address transition planning in this era of accountability actually produce desired results need to increase

### **DCDT's Recommendations:**

1. Incorporate youth with disabilities in sample frame for all educational research
2. Move beyond short-termed, short-lived demonstration projects to develop projects that provide direct application of outcomes, sustain those outcomes, and expand/replicate successful and desired outcomes through dissemination and further technical assistance to agencies
3. Increase research and funding for follow-up studies to evaluate the appropriate application of research, and assure best practice research is accessible and understandable to the practioners

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## **Issue: Research that Addresses Social Relationships and Social Barriers to Inclusion**

No Child Left Behind coupled with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004 assures our youth with disabilities access to state general education environments and curriculum. As our children transition to adulthood, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) assures their Civil Rights to access, accommodations, and acceptance whether in their work place, their community, and to have a home they can call their own. However, “social acceptance” (or perhaps inclusion in environment and curriculum) remains elusive for individuals with disabilities. Success for many children and adults with disabilities is often more dependent on whether they are able to establish positive relationships with peers, teachers, supervisors, professors, and neighbors.

We bring to your attention that half of college students *without* disabilities never graduate, especially students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Transition-age youth need specific skills in areas such as math, literacy, and independent living. “However, skills in these areas will not assure successful outcomes in the absence of adequate social skills” (Bremer & Smith, 2004, p. 1). Research suggests that the number one problem for those individuals was failure to integrate socially (e.g. if a college freshman fails to feel a sense of belonging at the institution within the first eight weeks, the odds of dropping out are high) (Raley, 2007; Tinto, 1987). Results for our young adults with disabilities are even more dismal (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000). Many individuals with disabilities may have even stronger feelings of being “different.” In community life, appropriate social behavior may be even more important than academic or job skills in determining whether one is perceived as a competent individual (Black & Langone, 1997). However, meta-analyses of research on programs and practices meant to increase social skills of youth with disabilities indicate they generally are not very effective (Alwell & Cobb, 2006; Gresham, Sugai, & Horner, 2001, Nati).

DCDT applauds the research community for its continuing interest in studies designed to examine the benefits of durable goods, assistive technologies, behavior methodologies, universal design, and specific academic curriculum. However, we are concerned that this research often focuses on the technological “fix” for which outcomes can be relatively easily defined and measured. We ask that the research community not to neglect the need for further research examining social relationships in the special education and rehabilitation fields.

### **Assessment of gap/duplication**

Current research falls short in the following areas:

- Research that examines the issues affecting “social acceptance,” social relationships, building social capital, and social networks, are not specified in the research descriptions
- Research and resources that leads to the social integration of Americans with disabilities into the workforce, and promotes full access to community life is needed across all disability fields

- Federal funding is absent for research on social relationships in the special education and rehabilitation fields
- Data, and more importantly, its application designed to support social networking and creating natural supports (in the workplace, school/ college, or community) is lacking

### **DCDT Recommendations:**

1. Increase research and funding for studies that leads to application and design of resources for mentoring, and acclimation programs to college campuses, workplaces, and/or community
2. Increase research and funding for studies that leads to application and design of resources for individuals with more severe disabilities, which in turn leads to and improves social networking (e.g. “circles of support”)
3. Research/funding on the implementation and sustaining of person-centered plans in all environments of the individual with disabilities

### **Issue: Rigorous Academics at the Expense of Quality Transition Planning**

While we prepare our youth with disabilities to excel academically using methodologies that are scientifically sound, DCDT believes it is often done at the expense of quality transition planning. This planning is defined in law as:

a **coordinated set of activities** for a child with a disability that is designed to be within a results-oriented process, ... focused on **improving the academic and functional achievement** of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement **from school to post-school activities**, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. IDEA 2004, [34 CFR 300.43 (a)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)].

DCDT is concerned that practioners persistently rely on ineffective procedures based on outdated research. New research and resulting activities/methodologies must reflect the mandate of recognizing individuals with disabilities in terms and actions of being a person first, be child/client focused, and promote self-determination using coordinated services. Practioners, counselors, and teachers have engaged in developing individual plans for education (IEP), employment (IPE) or for home based community services (HBCS) with evidence showing limited effectiveness of the person-directed and managed processes (e.g. student-led IEPs, interagency agreements) (Crane, Gramlich, & Peterson, 2004; Government Accounting Office, 2003; Wells, Sandefur, & Hogan, 2003). NLTS2 wave 1 data showed that overall only 14% of students had a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and 17% of students had some other type of



agency personnel participate in their transition planning when 38% had vocational goals and 48% had postsecondary education goals specified in their transition plans (Cameto, Levine, and Wagner, 2004).

DCDT is also concerned that person-focused planning and individualized curriculum development necessary for student desired postschool outcomes are lost at the expense of meeting bureaucratic expectations and diploma requirements (Government Accounting Office, 2003; Wells, Sandefur, & Hogan, 2003).

Despite more than two decades of federal initiatives in both education and workforce development, and recommendations made almost ten years ago by the National Council on Disability stressing the need for stakeholders to coordinate planning and functional linkages to meet the school and postschool needs of youth; braiding of resources and research continue to be hampered by inhibiting policies, bureaucratic mechanisms, and underfunded mandates (Crane & Mooney, 2005; Johnson, 2004; Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002; National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004; National Council on Disability & Social Security Administration, 2000). Community service agencies that serve individuals with disabilities are based upon the individual meeting eligibility criteria provided there are sufficient funding resources available instead of resorting to strategies such as community resource mapping. Community resource mapping promotes interagency collaboration by better aligning programs and services for youth and families (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004). When collaborative strategies effectively link systems by aligning organizational missions, policies, funds, actions, and day-to-day management youth have greater access to the full array of services they need (Crane & Mooney, 2005; Johnson et al., 2002; National Council on Disability & Social Security Administration, 2000)

Education research needs to guide school and interagency teams to move beyond simple development of plans and measured success rates of their respective planning (compliance focused), to establish and evaluate the progress of the multidisciplinary teams effectiveness throughout the school year (purpose driven). New research focused on self-determined, community-based projects will help move the field from the complacent approach of “always doing what we’ve always done” to one that embraces the goals of *New Freedom*. Education research, all research, must lead to the development and utilization of best practices across all fields.

### **Assessment of gap/duplication:**

Current research falls short in the following areas:

- Research that examines student/client-directed individual IEP, IPE, or plans for HBCS need to inform practioners and teachers at the local level and be incorporated within preservice training at the Institutions of Higher Education level

- Education and Community agencies have been involved IEP development without enough real evidence that it is an effective process
- Post school outcomes research that includes not only transition to higher education, but also incorporates social skills, employment skills, and skills to be fully prepared for adult roles, and life in the community needs to inform both practioners and teacher-training institutions
- Research that exists (Crane, Gramlich, & Peterson, 2004; Government Accounting Office, 2003; Wells, Sandefur, & Hogan, 2003) indicates a disconnect between community agencies and educational agencies in planning for postschool outcomes.
- Research that examines the link between IEP/IPE/HBCS meetings, documentation, with quality education and quality outcomes
- Lack of combined research and engagement between community service/support agencies and schools fails to inform stakeholders if education and transition planning is working and where gaps lie to assure successful transition to adult community life, employment and/or continued postsecondary education
- Research that examines the role universal design, technology, self-determination, and social skill development play in the interventions teachers and other professionals use to meet students'/clients' goals in academics, functional instruction, and transition to career and community
- Research to that identifies instruments/procedures that work, and how practioners and teachers assure fidelity of implementation
- Practioners and teachers have little understanding of how to assess transitioning students to determine the individuals' person-centered preferences are (as opposed to program/bureaucratic-determined programs)
- Longitudinal research that crosses agencies to determine success rates and transition processes that work
- Policymakers, research funders, and research institutions needs to not only ask for stakeholder input, but also act upon federal directives and the repeated recommendations documented over the years

### **DCDT Recommendations:**

1. Increase research and funding for studies that describe the alignment of No Child Left Behind and IDEA 2004, its affect on transition supports and services, and fidelity of implementation
2. Increase research and funding for studies that incorporate middle school and high school children and their preparation to move into adult settings/services
3. Increase research and funding for studies that determine efficacy of student/client-directed individual planning and means to improve the right of those individuals for self determination
4. Increase research and funding for studies that examine processes required for transition from public school to adulthood with results to be disseminated and incorporated across agencies and settings

5. Increase research and funding for studies that describe the access and continuity of moving from school based to community/college/career based programs (under the authorities of Higher Education Act, The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act/ Public Law 109-270, IDEA 2004, ADA and Olmstead Resources, DD Act)
6. Increase research and funding for studies that include the full spectrum of individuals with disabilities, including individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their postschool outcomes
7. Increase research and funding for studies that evaluate the level of successful interagency collaboration and coordination between Education, Rehabilitation, Social Service Agencies, and community business agencies to achieve postschool options and sustain rates of success
8. Increase research and funding for follow-up studies to evaluate the appropriate application of research, and assure best practice research is accessible and understandable and used by all practioners across all agencies

### **Issue: Interagency Collaboration and Family Involvement**

Career development, transition specialists and teachers, take into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests, plan with youth with disabilities and their families the steps required to matriculate into adulthood. For the young adult to be successful requires the coordination of services between the public schools and a wide array of agencies, many represented on your committee. Yet we find a paucity of research and training that guides our education professionals and agency partners in the areas of *Interagency Collaboration and Family Involvement*.

### **Assessment of gap/duplication**

- Models of interagency collaboration, data, sharing, and coordinated services are not widely replicated
- Pockets of excellence, most often predicated upon the passion and dedication staff currently employed
- Evidence to practice needs to become more than a buzzword but rather a common, institutionalized, and expected *modus operandi*
- Development of knowledge management and communities of practice is needed to promote and improve a culture of acceptance, greater application of results to practice and cross-agency coordination in converting published data into policy and practice.

### **DCDT Recommendation:**

Expand and pool research/funding to describe the access and continuity of moving from school based to community/college/career based programs (under the authorities of Higher Education Act, The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act/ Public Law 109-270, IDEA 2004, ADA and Olmstead Resources, DD Act)



***FOCUSING ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT & TRANSITION  
FROM SCHOOL TO ADULT LIFE FOR INDIVIDUALS  
WITH ALL EXCEPTIONALITIES***



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Thank you for considering DCDT's recommendations. If you need additional information please contact Donna Martinez, DCDT's Government Relations Committee Chair at [dmartin336@msn.com](mailto:dmartin336@msn.com).

DCDT will be happy to share our expertise in the area career develop and transition of individuals with disabilities if needed. We look forward to ongoing dialogue and opportunities for collaboration with ICDR on these issues.

Respectfully submitted,

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**ADDED RESOURCES:**

*Knowledge Generation: What Works Transition Research Synthesis:*

- The *What Works Transition Research Synthesis Project* (Grant # H324W010005) was funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to review and synthesize the past 20 years of research and advancements in the area of transition for youth with disabilities. The project office was located at the School of Education at Colorado State University. As the research synthesis papers are completed they will be published on our website. See: <http://tinyurl.com/56frf6>

*Having a supportive social network is associated with college success:*

- Antonio, A.L. (2001). Diversity and the influence of friendship groups in college. *The Review of Higher Education*, 25(1), 63-89
- Thomas, S. L. (2000). Ties that bind: A social network approach to understanding student integration and persistence. *Journal of Higher Education*, 71(5), 591-615.

*National sample of about 3,000 first-year college students found that African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian Pacific American students reported a less strong sense of belonging than White/Caucasian students:*

- Johnson, D. R., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., Alvarez, P., Rowan-Kenyon, H., Longerbeam, S., Inkelas, K. K. (2006). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(5), 525-542.

*"...incongruence with one's student peers proves to be a particularly important element in voluntary departure" (p. 57).*

- Tinto, V. (1987). *Leaving college*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

*In community life, appropriate social behavior may be even more important than academic or job skills in determining whether one is perceived as a competent individual:*

- Black, R. S., & Langone, J. (1997). Social awareness and transition to employment for adolescents with mental retardation. *Remedial and Special Education*, 18(5), 214-222.
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*People with disabilities who experience "social exclusion" tend to have much poorer outcomes compared to those who feel they are socially integrated:*

- Bynner, J. (1999). Risks and outcomes of social exclusion: Insights from longitudinal data. London: Institute of Education, University of London. Retrieved November 18, 2007 from: [www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/core/documents/download.asp?id=828&log\\_stat=1](http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/core/documents/download.asp?id=828&log_stat=1)

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*Person-centered planning and circles of support can promote social inclusion of people with more severe disabilities:*

- Cotton, P., Goodall, S., Bauer, J., Klein, J., Covert, S., & Nisbet, J. (1992). *Moving from school to adulthood: The role of circles of support in the transition process*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability.
- Mount, B. (1997). *Person-centered planning: Finding directions for change using personal futures planning*. New York: Graphic Futures.
- Rainforth, B., York, J., & Macdonald, C. (1997). *Collaborative teams for students with severe disabilities: Integrating therapy and educational services* (2nd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

*Mentoring can promote greater social inclusion and development of natural support networks:*

- Rhodes, J. E., Grossman, J. B., & Resch, N. L. (2000). Agents of change: Pathways through which mentoring relationships influence adolescents' academic adjustment. *Child Development, 71*, 1662-1671.
- Stader, D., & Gagnepain, F. G. (2000). Mentoring: The power of peers. *American Secondary Education, 28*(3), 28-32.