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Articulating Roles and Responsibilities in
the Transition Planning Process: A
Practice Aimed at Figuring Out How to
Work Together

Marianne Murphy*

Thomas P. Golden†

*Cornell University, mm272@cornell.edu

†Cornell University, Tpg3@cornell.edu

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TRANSITIONS

Articulating Roles and Responsibilities in the Transition Planning Process: A Practice Aimed at Figuring Out How to Work Together

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Prepared by

*Marianne Murphy, CSW, Faculty
Thomas Golden, Faculty
Employment and Disability Institute
School of Industrial and Labor Relations
Cornell University*

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Introduction

It is clear that the intention of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Individual with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 require both the Education Agency and the Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (VESID, in New York State) to jointly participate in the development of transition plans for students with disabilities as they prepare for employment after high school. Both the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 define Transition as:

...a coordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.

...The coordinated set of activities must be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and

...Must include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (34 CFR 361.5(b)(5))

The Rehabilitation Act adds:

...Transition services must promote or facilitate the achievement of the employment outcome identified in the student's individualized plan for employment.

From the Federal level the laws mandate that states develop interagency agreements or other mechanisms for coordination between each non-educational public agency and with education officials (34 CFR Sec. 300.142 (a), Rehabilitation Act (Appendix 1); 34 CFR Sec. 361.22(b)).

On a local level the Individual with Disabilities Education Act and the Rehabilitation Act further supports interagency collaboration by clearly stating:

IDEA requires...“The IEP must include....For each student beginning at age 16 (or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team), a statement of needed transition services for the student, including, if appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages.” (34 CFR 300. 347(b)(2);

And the Rehab Act...”ensure that Individual Plans for Employment (IPE) are developed and approved at the earliest date possible during the transition planning process, but, at the latest, prior to the time the student exits school.” (34 CFR 361.22(a)(2).

Yet, even though the intention of collaboration is well documented in the law, we find that the two issues most often identified as barriers to school and vocational rehabilitation (VR) collaboration are poor or inaccurate perceptions of vocational rehabilitation by school staff, youth and parents, and conversely of schools and youth in

transition by VR staff; as well as nonexistent or ineffective procedures to structure collaboration by school and VR staff across the referral, eligibility determination, planning, and service delivery process (Benz, Johnson, Mikkelsen, Lindstrom, (1995). These barriers held true for students, their families, schools, vocational rehabilitation and other transition partners in the central region of New York State. This brief will highlight specific steps and strategies implemented by a regional workgroup to remedy these barriers resulting in improved transition services and outcomes experienced by students with disabilities in this catchment area. Reviewed will be the specific barriers faced, interventions taken to remove barriers and measures of success.



Organizing To Identify and Address the Issues

In 1996 a team comprised of staff and management from the Central Regional Offices of New York State Department of Education's Special Education Quality Assurance, the Syracuse District Office of the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID), and staff of the Transition Coordination Site at Cornell University formed the Syracuse Transition Leadership Group (STLG). As a result of forming this team each of the members has the opportunity to inform the others of activities and issues, thus moving towards a clearer working relationship at the regional level. Originally the primary function of the team was as an advisory group for a transition systems change initiative within New York State started in 1992. The group recognized that in order to improve the transition outcomes for students with disabilities as they move from school to adult life, effective coordination between school district personnel and VR counselors from VESID was essential. Throughout the years the group has met regularly to discuss issues of transition and other concerns as it relates to secondary education and adult vocational rehabilitation (VR) of the state VESID system.

As the STLG met, it became increasingly aware of certain persistent issues. It was reported to the STLG that despite repeated trainings, school districts were still uncertain about VESID and its role in transition, connections between VESID and secondary schools were inconsistent and VESID found obtaining needed documentation for eligibility determination often difficult. These findings were consistent with what was identified most often in professional literature as barriers to effective transition practices as referenced in the introduction to this brief. It was determined by the STLG that a process was needed to strengthen the link between VESID and school districts throughout the Central New York region. As administrators, the group felt that improved connections between systems supported the existing goal of smoother transitions from secondary education to post secondary employment or training. They believed with an efficient exchange of information, it is more likely a plan for future employment goals could be accomplished with limited duplication of services and failed attempts at success. Furthermore with an open channel for dialogue, expertise from each institution could inform each others practice.

Generating Solutions

The STLG turned to the concept of Articulation Agreements as a means to facilitate the connection between secondary education institutions and the adult branch of VESID. Although Articulation Agreements are typically used between High Schools and Colleges or in transfer situations, many of the features of Articulation Agreements met the needs identified by the STLG, given that in this case the transition is between secondary education and VR. Articulation is defined in many ways, one of which is: the act of joining things in such a way that motion is possible (Princeton University's WORDNET). Articulation Agreements promote coordination between secondary and postsecondary institutions, and they facilitate collaboration for ongoing working relationships (United States Education Department (1997). Articulation Agreements can set the stage for more specialized agreements to be developed as the need arises.

To begin the development of the Articulation Agreement, the STLG formed focus groups that included VESID counselors, school district staff and administration from both agencies. In the end the groups identified key elements which they felt should be included as part of the Articulation Agreement: clearly identified points of contact within both agencies; defined roles and responsibilities; increased knowledge of services offered by VESID; clearly outlined required documentation needed for eligibility determination; and a procedure to inform schools about student outcomes after graduation. The focus groups were also asked their thoughts on how best to develop and implement a process to address those elements. They agreed that whatever was created needed to be simple and individualized for the district and the corresponding VESID liaison.

Impacting Practice

As a result of these recommendations the Transition Articulation Agreement was developed. The Transition Articulation Agreement is an agreement between an individual School District and VR that clearly states the procedure by which the two will collaborate. The Transition Articulation Agreement outlines the method by which referrals are made, documentation is exchanged and communication is accomplished. The Transition Articulation Agreement is a combination of process and structure. On one hand the process requires a school district team (teachers, nurse, guidance, administrators, Committees on Special Education (CSE) and special education clerical staff) to meet with VESID personnel in order to complete the document. On the other hand, during the process of completing the document a system is developed which provides a structure for future practices. The expected outcome is a clearer understanding of: VESID services; the referral process; documentation exchange; and communication between agencies. In keeping with the recommendations of the focus group, the document itself is a simple form. It is divided into four sections: 1) contact information; 2) referral method; 3) documentation; 4) and feed back procedure. As

school district staff and VESID personnel complete the form the process becomes a training opportunity for both agencies, as demonstrated during the pilot phase. A more complete explanation of the Articulation Agreement and example follows later in this brief.



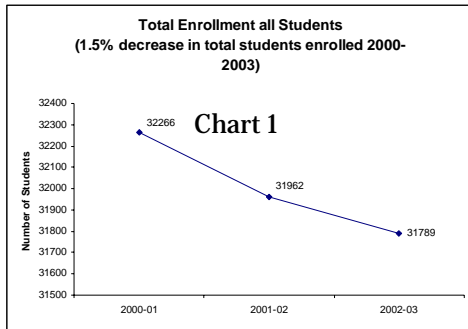
Results

When evaluating the success of this demonstration pilot, the STLG was interested in the relevancy of the tool, the ease of the process, and the overall results of the pilot. A member of the STLG took responsibility for managing the pilot which included facilitating the initial meeting between School Districts and VESID personnel and collecting data. Over the last three years thirteen school districts along with their VESID counselors have completed or are in the process of completing Transition Articulation Agreements. Reports from teachers and counselors point towards positive results. As a outcome of these meetings, staff discovered internal barriers which prevented communication, documentation exchange and referral of certain student populations (i.e. 504 and resource students). Services, roles and responsibilities for both agencies (district and VR) were defined and assigned to the appropriate party.

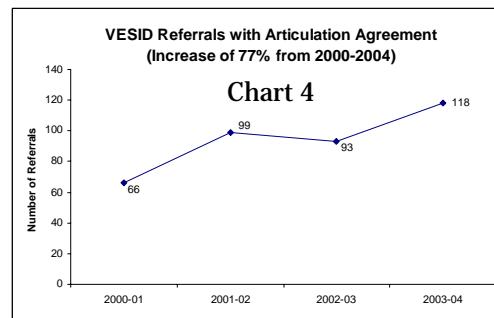
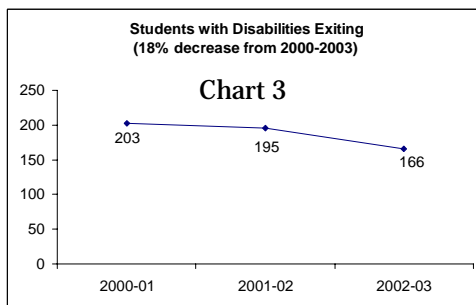
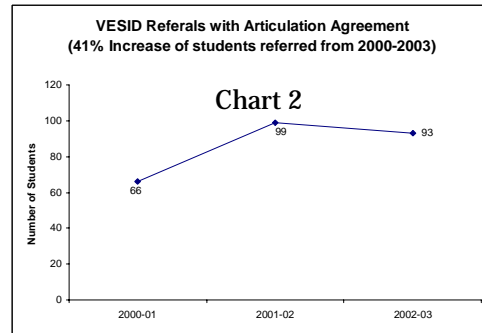
In addition to these positive accounts the process has demonstrated an increase in student referrals to VESID. Data was collected from ten of the thirteen districts currently involved in the project. Two High Schools from a very large urban center were excluded because data was unobtainable. The districts surveyed included several rural and two large suburban districts. Data was collected starting in 2000-01 before the articulation agreements were implemented. In the years from 2001-2004 the articulation agreement process was implemented in the Districts. District data for 2004 is not yet available. The charts illustrate although enrollment for the districts has declined for the past three years there was an increase in VESID referrals for the same period of time.

As we look at this data it is important to understand that the Articulation Agreement alone can not be credited for the increase in referrals. Having said that, one might suggest the process leading to the agreement is a factor contributing to the increase. The elements that constitute the Articulation Agreement: team investment; administrative leadership; clearly articulated roles and responsibilities; timelines; process evaluation; and measurement all have led to an efficient system. Another mitigating factor in the success of the pilot was the role of facilitation. All of the districts were facilitated by either by the author or the VESID Transition Counselor who subsequently was assigned to those districts. The counselor has been very committed to improving the connection between districts and VESID. Although it might be very easy to look at the Articulation Agreement as the force behind the increase, one has to be aware of the positive impact of a quality rehabilitation professional. As we pursue the project we will identify key counselor characteristics which spell success with schools and students.

Data: NYS District Report Card



Data: VESID CAMS



***n=10- Districts participating in Articulation Agreement Pilot Project**

Summary

In summary, the Transition Articulation Agreement serves as a means to bring about cross-agency collaboration. The Transition Articulation Agreement fosters effective and substantive collaboration through a multifaceted approach. This multifaceted collaborative approach is evidenced in both the development and implementation phase. The Transition Articulation Agreement includes strategies that are factors which lead to successful post school outcomes such as (a) clarification of roles and responsibilities, and coordinated services among vocational, regular and special education teachers, and counselors; (b) involvement of students, parents, businesses and community representatives in interagency transition teams; and, (c) effective and substantive interagency collaboration (NCD 2000). As we move towards increasing collaboration we look for positive student outcomes associated with successful interagency collaboration such as: high percentages of students participation in employment and other community programs during high school; high rates of students participating in co-funded career assessment and development opportunities; increasing rates of concurrent enrollment in high schools and community colleges; and increasing numbers of students with disabilities being referred to and served by a variety of adult service agencies following high school (Hasazi, Furney, Destefano (1999)).

The need for processes such as the Transition Articulation Agreement transcends the obvious benefits of improved collaboration and clearer channels of communication and provides the foundation for service planning. As relationships and systems are established, joint planning between VESID and School District staff can be introduced at the secondary level. The Rehabilitation Act requires that an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) is written for each VESID eligible student prior to their leaving high school. Where arrangements such as the Transition Articulation Agreement exist it is likely that the goal of having an IPE prior to exit will be realized.

Contact Information

Marianne Murphy
Cornell University
Employment and Disability Institute
201 ILR Extension Bldg.
Ithaca, NY 14853
Phone: 607-255-1664
Fax: 607-255-2763
e-mail: mm272@cornell.edu

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Appendix A: Implementing the Articulation Agreement

Articulation Agreement Form:

Articulation Agreement

Section 1. VESID Contact Information	
<i>Name of District Manager Mr./ Ms.</i>	<i>Phone:</i>
<i>Name of Sr. Counselor</i>	
<i>Name of liaison Counselor Mr./ Ms.</i>	<i>Phone:</i>
<i>Address of VESID District Office</i>	
<i>Name of Regional Associate</i>	<i>Phone:</i>

VESID contact information: Complete the form by entering information in the appropriate spaces.

Section 2. District Contact Information	
<i>Name of building principal: Mr./ Ms.</i>	<i>Phone:</i>
<i>Address of principal:</i>	
<i>Name of designee: Mr./ Ms.</i>	<i>Phone:</i>
<i>Address of designee:</i>	

District contact information: Complete the form by entering the name of the building principal and/or his/her designee responsible for transition.

Section 2a. Contact Agreement	
<i>Name, title and phone of Representatives to meet with VESID Counselor: i.e. School Nurse, Counselor, transition liaison, 504 officer, special ed)</i>	
<i>Name:</i>	<i>Title:</i>
<i>Phone:</i>	
<i>Name:</i>	<i>Title:</i>
<i>Phone:</i>	
<i>Date of meeting:</i>	<i>Location of meeting:</i>

Please enter the name(s) of any other school personnel the VR Counselor may be meeting with other than the individual noted in section 1. These individuals will have a direct and active role in coordinating all student referrals to Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID).

Medical and GED
 Often students with disabilities not receiving services through Special Education or a 504 plan are not seen by the district as eligible for VESID services, yet many of them are. For example, students who have medical issues such as asthma or diabetes may be eligible for VESID services. In addition, students with disabilities who are pursuing a GED should be counted in the appropriate category on this form.

Section 3. Number of students	
Students with disabilities exiting in current year IEP 504 GED Medical () () () ()	Students with disabilities exiting in the next year IEP 504 GED Medical () () () ()
Section 3a- Number of students at risk	
Number of students at risk of dropping out (current year) ()	

To be certain each student eligible for VESID services is considered for referral, districts should make an effort to estimate the number of students leaving in the next two years. The form includes several designated categories. These numbers will act as a reference point, which the district office can use to compare with the number of referrals submitted

Although there is no way to know how many students plan to drop out in a given year, it is important to identify those students at risk who might require/ be eligible for VESID assistance in achieving employment goals. Be aware, for purposes of this planning activity, your count should include students who have not reached their junior and senior years. Please place the number of students with disabilities who are at risk of dropping out on this form.

Section 4. Referral Process/ Agreement
Please state the referral process that the district and the VESID Counselor agreed to. Include dates, person responsible.
Name Phone

Each individual district and VESID liaison needs to agree upon the process by which students will be referred. Some districts submit all their students for consideration, while some counselors prefer to have a preliminary review of the students prior to referral. Please state in the space provided the agreed upon referral process. In determining which students should be referred, the eligibility criteria is as follows: A person is eligible for vocational rehabilitation services if the individual (a) has a physical or mental impairment that is a substantial impediment to employment; (b) can benefit in terms of achieving an employment outcome consistent with an individual's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice; and (c) requires vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, retain or regain employment.

Section 5. Documentation Agreement

Please indicate the type of documentation that the VESID counselor and the district agree needs to be forwarded to VESID.

Name
Phone

Districts should be prepared to provide certain information to the VESID Counselor in order to determine eligibility and to develop a service plan leading to employment success. Districts and VESID counselors should agree to which documentation is necessary. It is also critical to indicate who is responsible for providing that information and when will it be provided. (See the back panel for suggested documentation).

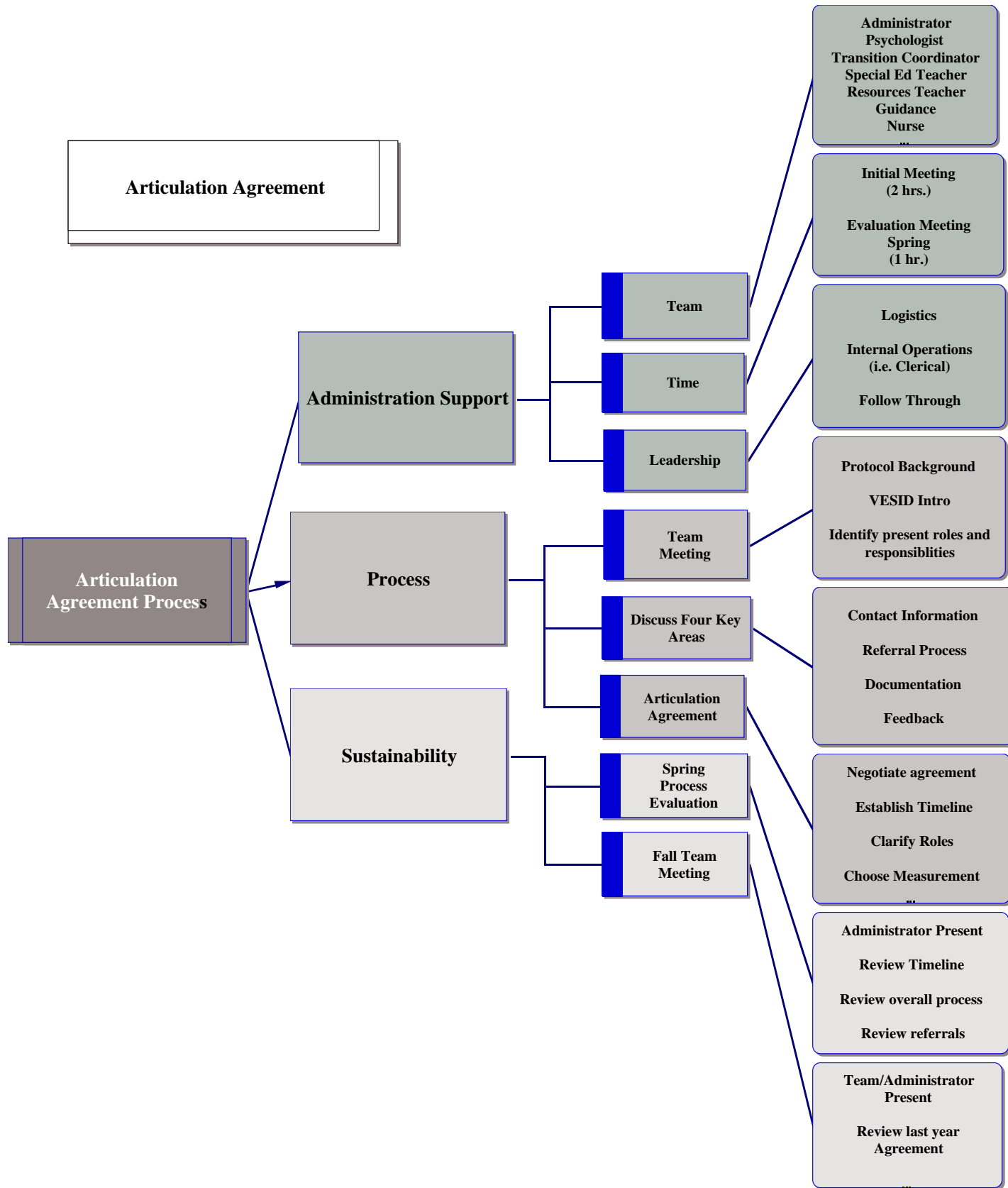
Section 6. Feedback Agreement

Please indicate the feedback process that the district and the VESID Counselor agreed to. Please include person responsible and phone number.

Name
Phone

Districts have expressed an interest in knowing about the status of student's applications, as well as the outcome of former students being served by VESID. For students still in school, the identifying referral source (school), will be notified of the status of the student's case. In regard to former students, District personnel and VESID Counselors will need to agree as to what type of information is useful, how will it be passed along and who will receive it.

Flow Chart of Events





Articulation Agreement Process Outline

The goal of the Articulation Agreement Protocol is to initiate a smooth process whereby VESID and Districts effectively communicate and collaborate in a timely fashion for the successful transition of students exiting High School. The following section will describe the Flow Chart of events (illustration page 13) by which the Articulation Agreement is developed, implemented and evaluated.



Administration Support

Administrative support is fundamental for the success of this process. Administrator support includes commitment of staff, time and space for the protocol to take root. For example, Administrators need to be present at these meetings, as it is likely decisions will be required regarding organization operations, which can only be made by the Administrator. In addition, often the Administrator can provide a larger view of issues impacting the development and implementation of the plan. Finally, it is necessary for the success of this collaboration that Administrators be present at these meetings to provide leadership and credibility to the process. The following topics detail the types of commitments required to execute this protocol.

Team

The first commitment is to select the staff to form a team. This is the Administrators responsibility. The team should include anyone who has anything to do with Transition in the District and VESID. It is critical that all persons who have a role in educating students with an IEP or 504 plan, work together to plan well for students. We find that there are many opportunities for students to be missed by VESID for a variety of reasons. Good communication between professionals is critical to coordination. Having all professionals present assures that everyone has a voice in the process.

Administrator
Psychologist
Transition Coordinator
Special Ed Teacher
Resources Teacher
Guidance
Nurse
BOCES

It is critical that all persons who have a role in educating students with an IEP or 504 plan work together to plan well for students. We find that there many opportunities for students to be missed by VESID for a variety of reasons. Good communication between professionals is key to coordination.

Time

Another necessary commitment is time for the team to meet. The intent to these meetings is to provide an opportunity for all parties to plan for the smooth coordination between VESID and Districts/BOCES. The two structured meetings (Initial Meeting and Evaluation Meeting) will streamline necessary processes and save time in the end: 1) the initial meeting is facilitated and structured for planning and training; 2) the evaluation meeting is used to identify gaps and necessary changes for next year. The evaluation meeting is also an opportunity to ensure that all appropriate students have been identified.

Initial Meeting - (2 hrs.)

Evaluation Meeting - Spring - (2 hrs.)

Leadership

School administrators are often pulled in a multitude of directions. Recognizing that fact, it must still be said that administrative involvement during certain phases of this process is necessary. Administrators are needed to facilitate the following steps: 1) make space and time available for the process; 2) invite clerical staff to be involved in order to help solve document exchange issues; and 3) administrators provide the leadership to help find solutions for issues that might arise. In addition administrators need to be aware of how the collaboration is progressing.

Logistics

Internal Operations - (i.e. Clerical)

Follow Through



Process

The objectives of the process phase of the Articulation Agreement are to introduce the key elements needed for improved communication and coordination between Districts and VESID. These elements were identified by a multidiscipline focus group as critical components in a protocol, which in the end, would facilitate effective communication and collaboration between the two agencies. The process includes the relevant stakeholders in designing the plan to implement and evaluate the four key elements of the Articulation Agreement. IN the end, a step by step method is thus, improving the smooth transition for students leaving high school. The following topics further describe the process phase of the Articulation Agreement Protocol (illustration page 13).

Team Meeting

The team meeting is the setting where all relevant stakeholders convene in order to use a protocol to create the Articulation Agreement. The meeting begins by addressing how and why the Articulation Agreement Protocol was developed. At this time the VESID counselor will clarify the role with schools and the services

they provide. Together the district staff and the VESID counselor will review their current practices by which they communicate and collaborate. The facilitator will: 1) describe the multidiscipline focus group process and how the key elements were established; 2) VESID introduces their services, roles and responsibilities; 3) district staff discusses current processes, including roles and responsibilities for connecting with VESID.

Protocol Background

VESID Intro

Identify present roles and responsibilities

Discuss Four Key Areas

The four key elements are introduced to the team. The team identifies how these key areas are currently being addressed as the articulation agreement form is reviewed section by section.

Contact Information

Referral Process

Documentation

Feedback

Articulation Agreement

The critical goal of the Articulation Agreement is for the team to reach consensus about what will work for both school staff and VESID staff when students are transitioning from high school. In the end, the success of the Articulation Agreement protocol rests in the functional coordination between these two agencies and in a smooth transition for students. The positive outcome of the agreement will ensure students who are eligible for VESID services are connected to VESID prior to graduation. The process steps are as follows: 1) facilitator leads team through the agreement. Team comes to consensus on what has worked and what needs to be changed. Form is completed; 2) team works out a timeline for activities, documents and who is responsible; 3) discuss the means by which the team will know that the process is benefiting students, team

identifies indicators of success and a means to measure them; 4) determine date for evaluation of the process (spring).

Negotiate agreement

Establish Timeline

Clarify Roles

Choose Measurement



Sustainability

In order for sustainability to be realized, the process needs to be effective and efficient. To assure the continuity of the process it is necessary for the team to meet annually in order to verify that the developed plan is being implemented. Furthermore, the plan needs to be evaluated for its efficacy. Each year the team meets and makes necessary changes. Tracking data and providing feedback is primary to this process. These connections should link the Individual Education Plan (IEP) to the development of a successful Individual Plan for Employment (IPE).

Spring Process Evaluation

It is necessary for the team to meet in order to verify that the processes have been in place and all students have been accounted for: 1) Administrator is present to help assess the process; 2) Team evaluates timeline for parts that worked well and parts the need changes; 3) Check for space plan, contact persons, and other process issues; 4) Check for accuracy of referrals (any missed students); 5) Check for accuracy and the timely exchange of documents.

Administrator Present

Review Timeline

Review overall process

Review referrals

Fall Team Meeting

Each year changes in staff, space and students need to be addressed early in the school year. The fall team meeting is a time when changes can be made to improve the process. It is also the time to look at data to inform the process: 1) Administrator and full team assists in reinitiating process; 2) Check last years agreement for staff changes and adjust Articulation Agreement where needed i.e. staff, timeline, documentation; 3) Review data, look at measurements previously agreed upon, and use data to inform planning for the coming year.

Team/Administrator Present

Review last year Agreement

Review Data

**Marianne Murphy
Cornell University
Employment and Disability Institute
201 ILR Extension Bldg.
Ithaca, NY 14853
Phone: 607-255-1664
Fax: 607-255-2763
e-mail: mm272@cornell.edu**