

Transition-Related Professional Development Needs of Wisconsin Special Educators

Early work experiences during high school are among the strongest predictors of post-school employment success for youth with disabilities. It is essential that special educators and transition personnel be well equipped to provide high-quality career development experiences to high school students with disabilities. Yet, little information is available about the design and delivery of professional development for high school teachers who work with these students. Our goal was to identify the transition-related professional development needs of teachers in Wisconsin and to gain their perspective regarding the most promising approaches for delivering transition-related information, resources, and training

to practitioners. We hope this information can be drawn upon to inform the content and provision of transition-related professional development opportunities in the state.

About Our Survey

We surveyed special educators throughout Wisconsin to address the following questions:

1. How are transition-related professional development topics prioritized by special educators throughout the state?
2. How are various sources of professional development evaluated by practitioners and which of these sources have they recently accessed?
3. With whom and how often do these special educators personally partner to support transition-age youth?

Surveys were distributed by mail and electronically in the spring of 2010. This brief addresses what we learned regarding the first two questions.

Natural Supports



Shared Activities
Valued Roles
Real Relationships

The goal of the Pathways to Independence Natural Supports project is to discover, support, and disseminate creative and promising approaches for supporting youth with disabilities to participate more fully and naturally in school, work, and community activities. We are funded by the Wisconsin Medicaid Infrastructure Grant through the Department of Health Services' Office of Independence and Employment and implemented through the Waisman Center. This project is designed to draw out the very best ideas and approaches for enhancing the full participation of youth with disabilities. For more information on creating opportunities for youth in your community, please visit our website:

<http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/naturalsupports/resources.php>

About Participating Teachers

We heard back from more than 1,200 teachers, with a response rate of 50%. The following information provides a portrait of these responding teachers:

- Nearly three quarters of teachers were female.
- They had an average of 16 years of total teaching experience, with 13 years at the high school level.
- As shown in Figure 1, the size of these teachers' caseloads varied.
- About 70% of teachers described their students as having "mild disabilities" (sometimes called high-incidence disabilities), and the remainder described their students as having "severe disabilities" (sometimes called low-incidence disabilities).
- Nearly 60% of teachers said *some* (i.e., 1-49%) of their work with students focused on employment, 34% said *most* (i.e., 50-99%) of their work addressed employment; and 5% said *all* of their work addressed employment.
- The average enrollment of their schools was 983 students.
- Teachers lived in communities of varying sizes (see Figure 2).

Figure 1

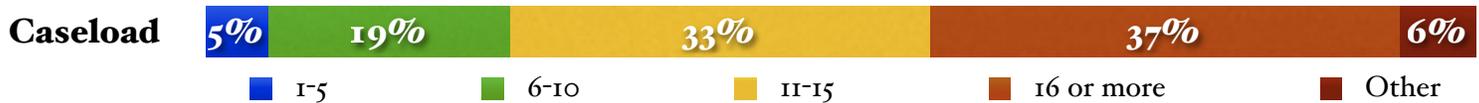
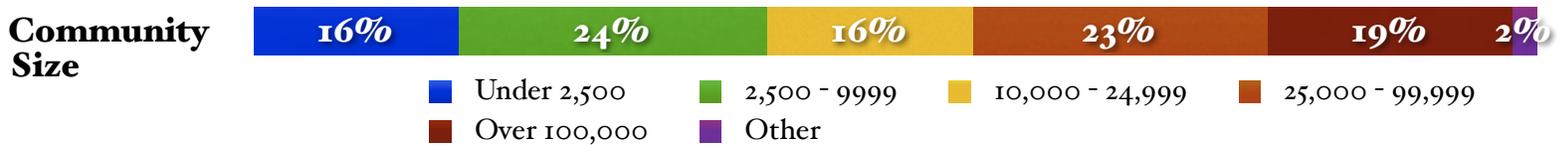


Figure 2



What We Found

Recommended Professional Development Topics

We asked teachers to rate their desire for professional development on 27 career development-related transition topics, using a scale ranging from 1 (*no desire*) to 4 (*strong desire*). If a topic was not applicable to their current work, teachers could indicate that. These topics were drawn from transition-related professional competencies, standards, and recommended practices in the area of secondary transition.

Figure 3 shows how these teachers rated each topic area. We have ordered the topics from

highest to lowest based on the percentage of teachers who said they had a strong desire for more professional development in that area.

Interestingly, for all listed topics, professional development was somewhat or strongly desired by at least half of all teachers. In addition, very few topics were considered not relevant to their work with students. These findings also may reflect the considerable range of responsibilities these teachers have when working with students.

Professional Development Topics

Figure 3



Recommended Professional Development Avenues

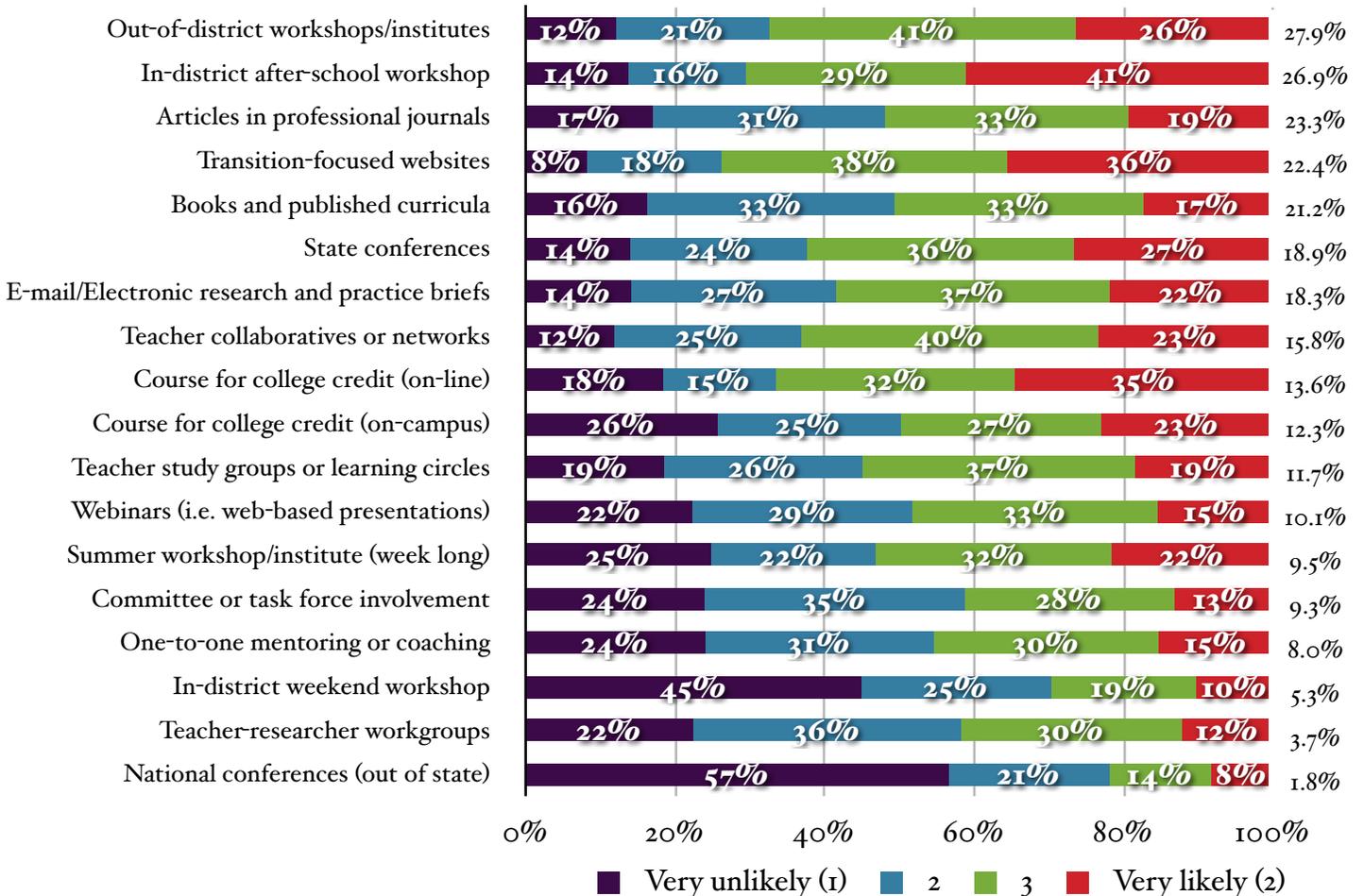
We asked teachers to tell us how likely they were to draw upon specific sources of professional development to improve their transition-related work, using a scale ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 4 (*very likely*). In addition, we asked whether or not they had actually accessed each source of professional development within the past 12 months.

Figure 4 shows how these teachers viewed each professional development source. The numbers on the right side of each bar line indicate the percentage of teachers who had used this source of professional development during the last year. We have ordered these sources of information and training based on what teachers said they actually accessed.

Overall, teachers identified an array of professional development avenues they would likely access if they were available. At the same time, it is also evident that differences exist in the preferences of teachers. We also asked teachers to tell us what factors most influenced their decision to participate in professional development, using a scale ranging from *least important* to *very important*. More than 62% said cost to themselves was very important, 57% said the availability of release time was important; 49% said the amount of travel time required was important; and 43% said the length of the training was important.

Professional Development Avenues

Figure 4



Some Ideas for Drawing Upon These Findings

For Special Education Administrators

- Dedicate some of the district's or school's professional development days specifically to career-related preparation for staff working with transition-age youth.
- Ask teachers to self-identify their specific career-related training needs.
- Support teachers in developing partnerships with mentors at community employment support agencies.
- Seek out and pass on to staff any transition/career development training opportunities (see listing of upcoming trainings and websites on pages 7-8).
- Provide release time and pay for teachers to attend trainings.
- Seek out and support staff participation in college coursework focused on transition and career development preparation.
- Encourage closer working relationships between transition teachers, vocational teachers, and guidance counselors.
- Look for successful examples of business partnerships and job-site development evident at other school districts.

For Professional Development Entities

- Ensure at least some professional development addressing career development is available within each CESA region to minimize travel requirements.
- Offer webinars and other trainings that can be accessed after-school hours.
- Offer graduate credits for conferences and multi-day trainings.
- Develop professional development options that target specific strategies for teachers (e.g., skill development, school/business/agency partnerships, job development).
- Share successful examples of on-campus job training experiences, business partnerships, job-site development, and career preparatory courses from other school districts.

For Teachers

- Communicate with school and district leadership about your specific transition professional development needs.
- Seek out practical tools and strategies from professional websites and journals (see list on p.8).
- Join the Wisconsin Transition Listserv to receive updates about upcoming trainings and other transition-related opportunities (contact Beth Swedeen at swedeen@waisman.wisc.edu to have your name added).
- Attend the Wisconsin Transition conference each February in Wisconsin Dells.

Summary

Input from transition teachers about their professional development needs and preferences related to career preparation for their students with disabilities is critical to the design and delivery of high-quality, easily accessible training and resources. Information about how teachers currently access professional development and the factors that affect their participation also are important to consider when planning professional development.

Over the coming months, we will be analyzing our data to identify whether professional development needs differ based on the students with whom teachers work (e.g., particular special education categories, caseload), their own experiences (e.g., type of teaching certification, years of experience), or the schools in which they work (e.g., size, geographic locale, school demographics). Such information could help professional development providers better tailor training to meet local needs.

For more information about the methodology and findings of this survey study, contact Erik Carter at carter@waisman.wisc.edu.

Useful Tools

• **Age Appropriate Transition Assessment Toolkit** includes a variety of free assessment tools, including career-related assessments.

http://www.nsttac.org/products_and_resources/tag.aspx

• **The Career Clusters Interest Survey** helps youth identify the top three Career Clusters of interest based on their responses. This pencil/paper survey takes about fifteen minutes to complete. Also available in Spanish.

<http://www.careerclusters.org/ccinterestsurvey.php>

• **Essential Skills to Getting a Job** has fact sheets outlining the skills employers look for and how youth and schools can build those skills.

http://www.dol.gov/odep/documents/essential_job_skills.pdf

• **How-to Guide for Creating School/Business Partnerships** includes steps, checklists, self-assessments for establishing school/business partnerships.

http://www.corpschoolpartners.org/pdf/coke_how_to_guide.pdf

• **Monster.com** includes a series of on-line quizzes and self-assessments to prepare for resume-writing, job interviewing, and other job and career preparation skills.

<http://resources.monster.com/tools/>

• **National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition toolkit** includes standards, indicators, self-assessments, and action plans for developing/strengthening the five key areas of standards development in transition for youth with disabilities.

<http://www.nasetalliance.org/toolkit/>

• **The O*NET** program has information on hundreds of standardized and occupation-specific descriptors. It also includes Career Exploration Tools, a set of assessment instruments for workers and students looking to find or change careers.

<http://online.onetcenter.org>

• **Wiscareers** has tools that help youth discover their skills and interests, link those skills to a career, connect the relevance between their current school experiences and their career path, and develop the job-seeking skills needed to acquire meaningful employment. Free in many school districts and at regional Job Centers.

<http://wiscareers.wisc.edu>

Upcoming Professional Development Opportunities

Employment Trainings

Community-Based Prevocational Services: Exploring Various Models and Approaches

Sponsored by Pathways To
Independence.

Dec. 1, 2010, Kalahari Resort, WI.
The event is free, but must register
to attend by Nov. 12, 2010.

Indicator 14: Improving Employment Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

Discussions will include:

1. What can be learned from post-school outcomes.
2. Integrated employment outcomes and the roles of DPI, DHS, and DVR.
3. Effective practices for inter-agency collaboration.

Dec. 2, 2010, CESA #4, 923 Oakland
St., West Salem, WI

Jan. 28, 2011, CESA #3, Fennimore,
WI, Conference Room A

Ongoing Employment Trainings (for a fee)

APSE conferences and trainings provide leadership, direction, and resources to support membership training and development by creating and delivering a high quality, premier annual national employment conference and implementing a Supported Employment Professional certification.

<http://www.apse.org/training/webcasts.cfm>

Transcen goals are to develop, implement and research innovative practices regarding school-to-adult life transition, career and workforce development, and inclusive community participation.

http://www.transcen.org/index.php?option=com_virtuemart&Itemid=101

Worksupport training events are developed and designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities, rehabilitation professionals, families and persons working in business and industry.

<http://worksupport.com/training/index.cfm>

Conferences

Wisconsin Transition Conference

Feb. 16, 2011: pre-conference, Kalahari Resort, Wisconsin Dells, WI

Feb. 18, 2011: conference, Kalahari Resort, Wisconsin Dells, WI

Visit <http://www.wsti.org> for brochure.

Rehabilitation and Transition Conference

The goal of the conference is to enhance community living for people with disabilities and economic disadvantages in Wisconsin.

April 6-8, 2011: Osthoff Hotel and Resort, Elkhart Lake, WI

Visit <http://www.rfw.org> for more information.

Addressing Career Development

- Association for Persons in Supported Employment.** APSE is a national organization with an exclusive focus on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
<http://www.apse.org/>
- Council on Exceptional Children's Division on Career Development and Transition.** DCDT promotes efforts to improve the quality of and access to career/vocational and transition services.
<http://www.dcdt.org/>
- National Center On Secondary Education and Transition.** NCSET coordinates national resources, offers technical assistance, and disseminates information related to secondary education and transition for youth with disabilities in order to create opportunities for youth to achieve successful futures.
<http://www.ncset.org/>
- National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth.** NCWD assists state and local workforce development systems to better serve all youth, including youth with disabilities and other disconnected youth.
<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/hsht>
- National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center.** NSTTAC helps states build capacity to support and improve transition planning, services, and outcomes for youth with disabilities.
<http://www.nsttac.org/>
- Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) Guideposts for Success.** ODEP develops and influences the use of evidence-based disability employment policies and practices. The Guideposts reflect the five key educational and career development interventions identified through research.
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/categories/youth/>
- Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.** DVR provides employment services and counseling to people with disabilities.
<http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dvr/>
- Wisconsin Paths to Employment Resource Center.** PERC provides education and training, technical assistance, research and resources to expand opportunities for persons with disabilities to earn income and participate fully in community life.
<http://www.percthinkwork.org/>
- Wisconsin Statewide Transition Initiative.** WSTI seeks to improve the results for students with disabilities by providing staff development, support services, and information dissemination to directors of special education, special educators, parents, youth, and community agency providers on transition requirements and best practices for students with disabilities.
<http://www.wsti.org/>
- Wisconsin Employment Network.** Provides an online community where people can connect locally, statewide, and beyond, in order to learn from each other and to work collaboratively to increase the possibilities for community employment for people with disabilities.
<http://employmentnetwork.ning.com/>