

TRANSITION AHEAD

Volume 1, Issue 3
March-April 2011



*A bi-monthly newsletter
for teachers and administrators involved
in the special education transition process.*

Dear Friends in Education:

February 17, 2011 marked the date of an important transition conversation, as several representatives throughout Berrien County attended a work session at the Berrien Springs Training Center. Participants included individuals from Berrien RESA, our local school districts, community colleges, area organizations, and community agencies.

The work session included discussion of current services from our local agencies and organizations, student opportunities within our local school districts, challenges that exist, and needs of our current student population.

Participants divided into 3 sub-committees (students who will leave high school with a diploma, students who will leave school with a Certificate of Completion, and students with significant needs) with the collaborative task of identifying specific student need, prioritizing, making recommendations, and/or developing a plan of action that is relevant to the specific group of students and the community who receives them as they exit the educational setting.

The next several weeks will be spent on fulfilling the plan of action each sub-committee has developed. Group facilitators and members from each sub-committee will be re-convening in early May.

**-Shari Lidgard, Supervisor of Ancillary Services & Compliance and
Craig Blasko, Supervisor of Special Education**

Contact Information:

Berrien Regional Education
Service Agency
711 St. Joseph Ave.
Berrien Springs, MI
49103-1583
(269) 471-7725
www.berrienresa.org

Special Education Director,
Stephanie Mack
stephanie.mack@berrienresa.org

Supervisor of Ancillary Services,
Craig Blasko
craig.blasko@berrienresa.org

Transition Coordinators:
Sandy Asmus
sandra.asmus@berrienresa.org
Amy Hume
amy.hume@berrienresa.org
Cathy Klaer
cathy.klaer@berrienresa.org

Transition Secretary
Ashley Rodriguez
ashley.rodriguez@berrienresa.org

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To receive "Transition Ahead" electronically, please visit www.berrienresa.org and visit the Communication page. Additional newsletters are also available.

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Caution: Information Ahead

Tips for Inviting MRS to an IEP

Article taken from "MRS Transition Bulletin-Winter Issue," Issue 324, January 2011

The least effective way to ensure Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) attendance at IEPs is dropping an invitation in the mail. This practice meets the IEP requirements from the school perspective of inviting the agency, however from the MRS perspective, it means that huge numbers of IEP invitations arrive in the mail daily (all of which need to be processed).

Ongoing communication between MRS counselors and school staff is essential to share information and discern whether or not a student needs MRS supports and determine whether or not MRS attendance is needed at a student's IEP. Some strategies that have worked to ensure MRS attendance at IEPs are:

- Planning in advance to discuss the reasons MRS participation is needed and to determine available times that work for the counselor
- Scheduling multiple IEPs in a block to maximize MRS travel time and time in the school
- Discussing MRS issues at the beginning of the meeting by starting with the post-secondary vision statement so the MRS counselor has the option of attending the entire meeting or just part of the meeting
- Giving the MRS counselor advance notice (often MRS counselor's schedules fill up weeks in advance)
- Spreading IEPs throughout the whole year to avoid the "IEP season"

Remember, we are all striving toward the same thing: to help students transition seamlessly from high school into employment. By planning to meet the needs of the MRS team in advance, you are only helping all parties involved meet the requirements of the IEP and the student's overall success in the transition process.

I Should Have Come In Sooner: Don't Wait Until 12th Grade!

Submitted by Randall Ward, Lake Michigan College Student Resource Center Director/Counselor and Susan Sullivan, Coordinator of Special Populations at Southwestern Michigan College

Students with IEP's or 504 plans thinking about attending college need to be aware that there are services available to them on college campuses. Typically, the student should ask about "Disability Services" so they can get connected with the right person. These individuals work with students on course scheduling, academic accommodations, how to request tutoring, exploring adaptive technology, and the list goes on.

What to expect when preparing to enroll: The student will need to self-identify that they have a disability in order to receive services. The student should be prepared to have in hand, their latest IEP/504 plan as well as their most recent psychological report in order to access these services. It is helpful for the "Disability Offices" at the postsecondary school to receive the most comprehensive information about the student's academic and functional performance, transition goals and suggestions that their K-12 has made on the Summary of Performance. Students can begin this process now, and should not wait until August!

Typical accommodations may include: Accommodations may include distraction free testing environments, additional test-taking time, and alternate format text books; all determined with the student needing to be able to identify what has worked for them in the past. There are no IEP's in postsecondary education and students must leave high school with the ability to self-advocate. The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act ends when the student leaves K-12 and thus there is no one to follow-up with the student to be sure they are successful in their postsecondary endeavors. Students need to understand and use time-management and organizational skills if they are to be successful at the next level. Remember, postsecondary institutions do not provide for alternative curriculum, extended time to complete homework, projects or papers, or allow for the use of notes on tests or modified tests.

Lake Michigan College (LMC) and Southwestern Michigan College (SMC) both utilize the COMPASS test for placement purposes. The results of this test determines if students are ready for college-level work or need to take "transitional/developmental" classes. Students need to have either a GED/High School Diploma or meet the "Ability to Benefit" scores on the COMPASS for non-High School Diploma/GED students, in order to qualify for Federal Financial Aid. At SMC, students that do poorly on the COMPASS may be offered a Provisional Admission or be denied admission. The COMPASS can be taken twice. Encourage students and parents to start the process now by scheduling a time to visit the campus of their choice and start the conversation.

Cruise Control: Using Assistive Technology

Submitted by Berrien RESA Assistive Technology Specialist, Rosanne Burden

For students with reading difficulties, an important accommodation would be the use of a text reader. Through the use of this type of software, students can access the text by having it read aloud and highlighted. There are a variety of text readers on the market with a range of features. The prices fall into a wide range and should be evaluated carefully to make the best match of features to the student's needs.

Read:OutLoud 6 from Don Johnston Inc. is a text reader that makes it easy to access the widest variety of e-books with text to speech and study tools. It also makes the Internet fully accessible with its included web browser. Some of the formats that it reads include: PDF, NIMAS, DAISY 3, Microsoft™ "Save as Daisy," Bookshare files, RTF, TXT, HTML, and XML. The reading voices are high quality and there is also an easy to use outliner for taking notes from the text—just drag and drop! Don Johnston has been making special needs software for many years and has an outstanding reputation. Read:OutLoud 6 sells for \$319 and further information can be found at www.donjohnston.com.

NaturalReader is a text to speech software program with natural sounding voices. This easy to use software can convert any written text such as Microsoft™ Word, WebPages, PDF files, and emails into spoken words. NaturalReader can also convert any written text into audio files such as MP3 or WAV for your CD player or iPod. Many students have their own iPods or MP3 players and could listen to audio versions of the text they need to access. Natural Reader actually has a free version (not many frills) that you can download and try out. Currently they have three educational versions for sale that range in cost from \$69-\$199. For more information, check out <http://www.naturalreaders.com/index.htm>.

Compliance Corner



SPP (State Performance Plan) B14 – Remember to submit current and alternate

contact information for each graduating or aging-out student. SEDAC members have unique credentials and enter the data into a secure website with PSC (Public Sector Consultants). Maintain a copy of this information at the local level, in the event the State contacts you for help in locating a student. If you have questions, call or email your Transition Coordinator.

SPP B13 – The annual Transition file review will be completed using the CIMS (Continuous Improvement Monitoring System) electronic workbook this year. Transition Coordinators will be contacting SEDAC personnel to set up times to accomplish the review in mid-April.

SOP (Summary of Performance) form – This document must be given to the student as they exit public school services, whether graduating with a diploma, certificate of completion, or aging out. It may be written at any time during the final year of school. (SOP details as found in the [Special Education Manual](#)).

Click It! Helpful Websites

The end of the year is approaching. All students with special education services leaving high school must have the SPP – B14 form completed before the end of the school year. The form has changed. You can also access the [Follow-Up form](#) on Berrien RESA's website. This form must also be completed before the end of the school year.

Summary of Performance (SOP) is also necessary for all students leaving high school. This document provides the student with a summary of academic and functional achievements, list of accommodations, post-secondary goals, and school recommendations to assist in accomplishing goals. Students can use this document when seeking accommodations in college or on the job, for assistance in college, and as a review of high school.

Are you ever looking for a clearinghouse of great quality transition information? **The Michigan Transition Outcomes Project (MI-TOP)** facilitates the development of effective systems that support students to achieve post-secondary outcomes, contain measurable student focused planning, student development activities, and continuous family and community involvement. Here you will find FOCUS on Results articles on Transition, LearnPort offerings, up to date legislative information, and links to transition organizations and informational websites. Check it out!

