

**The National Community of Practice on Transition
Community Meeting
February 6-7, 2006**

Breakfast Session: Youth Involvement
Facilitators: Peter Squire and LeDerick Horne
February 7, 2006 7:30-8:30 am

Members of the National Community of Practice on Transition met for a breakfast discussion on meaningful youth involvement. The group discussed the following two questions:

- **How should youth be meaningfully involved at the local level, state level and national level?**
- **What can the state teams in the ‘*national community of practice*’ do to promote youth and young adult leadership?**

At the local level, the group discussed the following:

- Leadership starts at the local level with the IEP. Involving students in their IEP builds self-advocacy skills.
- A strong local foundation of youth and young adults can then be scaled up. Youth and young adults who have leadership at the local level will have the experience to be able to then contribute at a state level. Youth and young adults with state level leadership experience will then be able to contribute at a national level. Leaders are grown.
- 1:1 mentors are beneficial especially before high school. By starting in junior high, there is sufficient time to build skills and insight before it’s time to transition.
- NJ’s Dare to Dream Youth Leadership Conference has a toolkit targeted to high school students who then go into middle schools.
- The idea that it’s linked: older leaders help create younger leaders to continue the cycle. High school works with middle school, etc.
- AZ discussed a local district experiencing rapid growth with three new high schools. Since they are new they are trying to “develop good habits” from the start. They brought in a consultant from Canada (Leslie P.) who brought a student with her to work on issues such as self-determination, advocacy, leadership, etc. The students all met in a conference center and designed their breakouts building leadership at the school level.
- It is beneficial to have colleges reach out to students at a local level. This can be done in a variety of ways. For example:
 - VA discussed a program through George Mason University where 7th graders are identified and mentored through high school to George Mason University. Only 10 students are chosen per year but this is an excellent model to be used by universities.
 - VA will present this at their conference.
 - Having students with disabilities who are in college talk to students with disabilities in middle and high schools to show them they can go to college and give them advice on how to get there.

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- LeDerick works with “Project Eye-to-Eye” where students with disabilities mentor younger students with like-disabilities through art activities building bridges to show how success can happen.
- Bringing the local business communities into mentoring can be highly beneficial. Business partnerships can help in attaining experience for youth, attaining jobs for those who may or may not be going to college and can help in sponsorship of activities.

At the state level, the group discussed the following:

- It is important to discuss ways to bring youth to the table, help them to understand their role and make their participation meaningful.
- For meaningful youth involvement, professional need to create opportunities for youth and young adults and allow them to steer their own experiences. It’s a building process.
 - PA gave a great example of how they developed a separate youth strand for their conference but then realized that by separating the youth and young adults from the rest of the conference, their participation was not as meaningful as it could have been. Through this experience they learned they must integrate youth involvement throughout their conference.
- Professionals need to welcome input from youth and young adults.
- At a state level, youth with disabilities can help mentor other youth with disabilities.
- Professionals need to set up a structure with support and then let youth have control.
- Common language is important both amongst professionals and between professionals and youth and young adults. For example:
 - A state team needs to be clear on their definitions such the definition of youth and what it means to be meaningfully involved.
 - Professionals need to be clear when speaking to youth and young adults; avoid acronyms, make sure concepts are explained thoroughly.
- Virginia discussed their self-determination project going on in one urban school, two rural schools and one suburban school – infusing self-determination curriculum into the general curriculum. This will be tied into their state conference. They are bringing youth to their conference and Peter, LeDerick and Jonathan will be working with them on-site.
- Taking students from the classroom to participate in things such as a state conference and other leadership activities is a huge issue.
 - If youth are going to participate, pay attention to when the conference is scheduled
 - Conference calls at night
 - Conference on the weekend
 - Make it accessible to their schedules
- When discussing youth it is important to discuss what youth you are talking about:

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- Are you talking about a youth who has transitioned from the system?
- Are you talking about a youth who is still in the system?
- Are you talking about a young adult who has transitioned and is now employed? Etc.
- It is important to identify roles for youth:
 - If you need a youth to participate on an activity discussing post-school outcomes, it is important to choose a youth with post-school outcomes who can understand the concept.
 - Not all youth can do everything!
- AZ discussed highlighting youth across the conference by having them be included in all aspects of the conference from developing to implementing.
- A member of the group discussed a personal experience they had when a youth was present on a committee and the youth was not able to give much input
 - The group discussed possible solutions to this issue:
 - Orienting the student to the board/committee/group. If someone is confused here is a reason why – not just because they are a youth or a youth with a disability.
 - Choosing youth who have experience or knowledge with the topic being discussed.
 - Making materials and topics youth friendly.
- At a state level, youth can be powerful advocates for state systems change through a variety of activities such as presentations.
- Many students with disabilities are recognized for their achievements. Use these students in participation models in the future.
- A member of the group discussed a video developed by Vocational Rehabilitation in their state that spotlighted 4-5 students in different employment positions. These students were in the school system and transitioned with successful outcomes. They hope to demonstrate the number of positive outcomes that occur because of collaboration. The videos should be out this summer.
- Every state CAN bring a youth representative with them.
 - Youth and young adults need to be prepared to come to the meeting.
 - Create leaders
 - Ongoing mentoring develops leaders
- Some states in the Transition CoP are further along than others in the process of establishing some sort of youth network in their state. When we get back together as a national CoP, each state should have some sort of formal or informal youth network developed!

At the national level, the group discussed the following:

- National organizations can offer students positions on boards as a youth/young adult advisor.

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- The National Center for Secondary Education and Transition has an interactive curriculum for youth by youth called “youthhood” that can be accessed online at youthhood.org
- It is important to make materials and language youth friendly at all levels.