National Standards & Quality Indicators

for secondary education and transition

NASET

NATIONAL ALLIANCE
for Secondary Education
and Transition

The National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition's objective in publishing this document is to provide a common and shared framework to help school systems and communities identify what youth need in order to achieve successful participation in postsecondary education and training, civic engagement, meaningful employment, and adult life. We see this framework as serving two important purposes:

- *To respond to increased requests from states, school districts, and service providers for information on:*
  - *Research-based practices, programs, and services; and*
  - *Benchmarks for effective secondary education and transition practices.*

- *To address new responsibilities for states to focus on accountability for each and every young person.*

This document combines the findings of current research on effective schooling, career preparatory experiences, youth development and youth leadership, family involvement, and connecting activities with the expertise of numerous individuals who work in these fields. The National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition sees this as an evolving document, requiring continual refinement as we learn more about what all youth need to achieve positive school and postschool results.

Introduction

State governments and local school districts have been challenged to improve student achievement, graduation rates, and the successful transition of students to postsecondary education, employment, and other aspects of community living. The federal government has assumed a key role in stimulating state and local efforts to improve secondary education and transition services through a variety of policy, interagency, systems change, demonstration, and research efforts. Importantly, these efforts have focused on creating educational, workforce, community-centered, and other developmental opportunities for all youth, including youth with disabilities, English language learners, youth from diverse multicultural backgrounds, youth from low-income families, and other at-risk youth. One major challenge in addressing youths' diverse needs is the development of a common vision, shared goals, and coordinated strategies among schools, community service agencies, families, employers, and others. The development of a set of national standards for secondary education and transition that embraces the perspectives of these and other stakeholders is therefore critically important in helping all youth achieve positive school and postschool results.

In November 2003, 30 national organizations assembled in Washington, DC to establish a national voluntary coalition, the National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (NASET). Subsequently, additional organizations joined the NASET effort, bringing the total involved to more than 40 national organizations and individuals representing general education, special education, career and technical education, youth development, postsecondary education, workforce development, and families. NASET was formed specifically to:

- identify what youth need in order to achieve successful participation in postsecondary education and training, civic engagement, meaningful employment, and adult life; and

- prioritize and address significant issues of national scale that have an impact on the development of appropriate policies and the provision of effective secondary education and transition services for all youth.

Since November 2003, NASET has worked to define a multi-organizational perspective by identifying benchmarks that reflect quality secondary education and transition services for *all* youth. NASET's primary task, therefore, has been to promote high quality and effective secondary education and transition services by articulating standards that serve to guide policy development and professional practice at both state and local levels.

The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET), headquartered at the University of Minnesota, has facilitated the work of NASET since its inception. NCSET is a national technical assistance and information dissemination center funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs. NCSET is specifically focused on strengthening state and local capacity to improve secondary education and transition policies and practices for youth with disabilities and their families (*http://www.ncset.org/*).

The Need for National Standards

The establishment of a common vision, along with goals and strategies for improving results for all youth, is necessitated by several significant trends and developments nationally. These include:

- **Policy Focus on Serving All Youth –** The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), signed by President George W. Bush in 2002, requires schools and school districts to demonstrate that all students are making "adequate yearly progress," as benchmarked by test scores and other measures. NCLB specifically requires that youth with disabilities, English language learners, youth from diverse multicultural backgrounds, youth from low-income families, and other at-risk youth be fully included within state and local district testing and accountability practices. Further, with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, Congress renewed its commitment to supporting youth with disabilities in making a successful transition from school to adult life. Central to accomplishing this broad policy objective is the recognition that the magnitude of improvements currently needed can only be achieved through collaborative partnerships that include students

and families, schools, and multiple agencies at the community, state, and national levels.

- **Recognition that Collaboration is Needed –** The diverse and complex needs of many youth cannot be met by any one school district, school, community service agency, or family, regardless of their hard work or good intentions. No single entity can go it alone. Today, the focused and committed efforts of a wide range of agencies are essential to establishing and maintaining the quality programs and practices needed to help youth to achieve positive school and postschool results. Interagency collaboratives and partnerships at the community level across the U.S. are expressing the need to create a shared mission and a common set of actions and strategies to support all youth and families within communities. Formal service coordination among collaborating entities is growing and is now understood to be crucial to the transition success of many youth with disabilities and other youth with special needs.

- **Ensuring All Youth Have the Skills Needed for Further Education and Employment –** Currently, the White House, Congress, the National Governors Association, and national organizations representing education and employer interests have concluded that America's high schools should be doing more to meet the needs of our youth and their families and to prepare youth for postsecondary education and employment. This view has lead to federal legislation and several emerging reform initiatives specifically focused on improving high school and postschool results for all students, including students with disabilities.

- **Ensuring All Youth Full Access to Essential Learning Opportunities –** Years of focused research has demonstrated that youth achieve better postschool outcomes when the transition from high school to careers, postsecondary education, and independent living is grounded in varied learning experiences which include academic development, career and technical education, work-based opportunities, service learning, youth development activities, and other related experiences. Creating this breadth and depth of learning opportunities requires

collaboration among schools, community-based youth development organizations, postsecondary programs, employers, families, and others.

- **Families' Expectations for Participation –** Although the nature of the relationship between parent and child changes during adolescence, families continue to play important roles in the lives of youth during high school and beyond. Parents and families want to support their youth by participating meaningfully in their educational planning, life planning, and other decision-making, and have become primary stakeholders in school governance, planning committees, and other efforts. It is essential to reflect families' perspectives and interests in national standards for secondary education and transition.

NASET Standards Development

As a first step, the NASET members identified five key areas for standards development (see figure below):

1. Schooling
2. Career Preparatory Experiences
3. Youth Development and Youth Leadership
4. Family Involvement
5. Connecting Activities

Next, internal focus groups were established to address each of the five areas. Each focus group consisted of 7–10 members and included both national organization representatives and experts from the field. Group members also represented the perspectives of youth with and without disabilities,

family members, educators, administrators, researchers, service providers, and employers.

NASET members participated in several day-long facilitated discussions to collectively describe the five areas and define associated standards and indicators of effective practice. The standards and indicators were derived from research as well as from members' experiences with and knowledge about best practices in secondary education, transition, youth development, family involvement, workforce preparation, and service coordination.

Criteria were established to guide the development of the standards and quality indicators. It was determined that standards and indicators should:
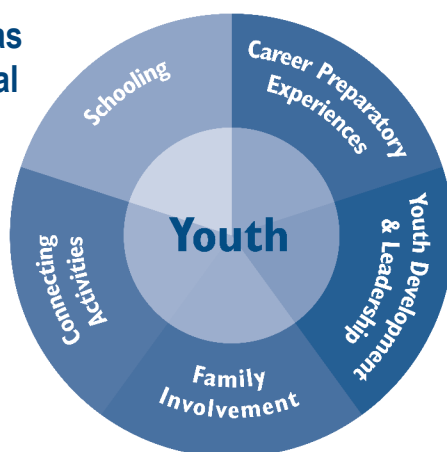
- reflect all youth;
- be general enough to serve various audiences;
- reflect both research-based practices and recognized best practices in the field;
- identify what is needed for youth to participate successfully in postsecondary education and training, civic engagement, meaningful employment, and adult life; and
- include effective practices within secondary education and transition programs and services for youth with disabilities and other youth with special needs.

A consensus-building process was used to achieve agreement on the standards and indicators for each of the five areas.

The Standards for Secondary Education and Transition

This document outlines standards and indicators that can be used to help assure high-quality transition for youth who are moving from a secondary school setting to the adult world. The standards and indicators identify practices that create quality secondary education and transition experiences for all youth. This set of standards can guide state and local administrators and practitioners responsible for planning and implementing comprehensive transition systems for youth, ultimately becoming a catalyst for constructive change in transition practices and policies nationwide. The member organizations of NASET intend this to be a living document that is regularly updated to reflect current knowledge.

The Five Areas of the National Standards and Quality Indicators

Schooling · Career Preparatory Experiences · Youth Development & Leadership · Family Involvement · Connecting Activities · Youth

1. Schooling

Schooling is the process of imparting knowledge and skills to individuals through curriculum and instruction, experiential learning, and work-based learning. Effective schooling provides individuals with the necessary tools to become productive citizens, pursue higher education and lifelong learning, engage in meaningful employment, and work toward achieving their life goals.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, all students are required to participate in assessments and accountability systems in order to ensure that (a) schools are held accountable for students' access to the general education curriculum, (b) schools hold high expectations for all students, and (c) student achievement is improved (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004).

Conditions that promote positive schooling experiences are supported when all students "have access to challenging curriculum and their educational programs are based on high expectations that acknowledge each student's potential and ultimate contribution to society" (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000, p. 2). All youth need to participate in educational programs grounded in standards and clear performance expectations and graduate from high school with a diploma that serves as a credential for accessing further education and employment opportunities.

Schools promote student learning when they:

- implement curricula and academic programs based on clear state standards;
- implement career and technical education programs based on professional and industry standards;
- provide assessment, curriculum, experiential learning, and work-based learning experiences that are universally designed in order to provide access to all students;
- build small learning communities;
- hire and retain highly qualified staff; and
- implement high school graduation standards and options based on meaningful measures of student learning and skills.

Exemplary schools consider the needs of all youth and implement academic and non-academic courses and programs of study that help all youth achieve successful postschool outcomes such as postsecondary education and training, employment, and civic engagement.

Standards and Indicators

1.1	State Education Agencies (SEAs)/Local Education Agencies (LEAs) provide youth with equitable access to a full range of academic and non-academic courses and programs of study.
1.1.1	Youth are aware of and have access to the full range of secondary education curricula and programs, including those designed to help them achieve state and/or district academic and related standards and meet admission requirements for postsecondary education.
1.1.2	SEAs/LEAs provide youth with information about the full range of postsecondary options and encourage youth to participate in secondary courses that will enable them to meet the admission requirements of their chosen postsecondary program of study.
1.1.3	Youth are aware of and have access to work-based learning (programs that connect classroom curriculum to learning on job sites in the community), service-learning (programs that combine meaningful community service with academic growth, personal growth, and civic responsibility), and career preparatory experiences such as job shadowing and informational interviewing.
1.1.4	Each youth develops and begins to implement an individual life plan based on his or her interests, abilities, and goals.
1.1.5	SEAs/LEAs use universally designed and culturally competent curriculum materials (e.g., assignments, tests, textbooks, etc.) that are accessible and relevant to the widest possible range of youth.
1.1.6	Youth are aware of and have access to technology resources that enhance learning.

1.1.7	SEAs/LEAs integrate advising and counseling into the education program of every youth and ensure that supports are readily available to enable each youth to successfully complete secondary school and enter postsecondary education or other chosen postschool options.	1.3.3	SEAs/LEAs use reliable and valid instruments and data collection strategies.
		1.3.4	Graduation and postschool outcomes data are used to evaluate current programs and services and to make recommendations for future programs and services linked to positive postschool outcomes.
1.2	**SEAs/LEAs use appropriate standards to assess individual student achievement and learning.**	**1.4**	**SEAs/LEAs offer educators, families, and community representatives regular opportunities for ongoing skill development, education, and training in planning for positive postschool outcomes for all youth.**
1.2.1	All youth participate in large-scale assessment and accountability systems that are universally designed, and have access to appropriate accommodations and alternate assessments.		
		1.4.1	Administrators, principals, educators, and paraprofessionals meet the essential qualifications to perform their jobs.
1.2.2	Youth have access to appropriate accommodations and multiple assessment strategies.	1.4.2	Staff development programs are based on careful analysis of data about the school and student achievement, and are evaluated to measure their effectiveness in improving teaching practices and increasing student achievement.
1.2.3	SEAs/LEAs use assessment and accountability systems reflecting standards that prepare graduates for successful postsecondary education experiences, meaningful employment, and civic engagement.		
		1.4.3	School leadership teams include educators, families, and community representatives as active members.
1.2.4	SEAs/LEAs use assessment results to improve instruction and implement appropriate educational plans for each youth.	1.4.4	Students have the opportunity to participate in all meetings in which decisions may be made concerning their individual school and postschool plans.
1.2.5	SEAs/LEAs use assessments that are not culturally biased.	1.4.5	Educators, families, and youth receive training on using data for planning and informed decision-making.
1.3	**SEAs/LEAs systematically collect data on school completion rates and postschool outcomes and use these data to plan improvements in educational and postschool programs and services.**	**1.5**	**SEAs/LEAs establish and implement high school graduation standards, options, and decisions that are based on meaningful measures of student achievement and learning.**
1.3.1	Data are disaggregated and reported in clear and relevant language for the intended audiences.	1.5.1	State and local assessments linked to high school graduation use measures of student achievement and learning that are valid and reliable and allow for accommodations and modifications as appropriate.
1.3.2	Data and resulting reports are widely disseminated throughout the education community—to policymakers, school board members, school administrators, parent groups, postsecondary educators, public and private school educators, and the community.		

(Continued)

1.5.2	Allowable accommodations and modifications, and the circumstances in which they may be used, are clearly defined for state and local assessments.
1.5.3	School staff members are provided training on determining and implementing appropriate accommodations and on determining eligibility for alternate assessments.
1.5.4	Educators, families, and youth are aware of and have access to information about the possible ramifications of completing alternate assessments.
1.5.5	Educators, families, and youth are counseled on how the choice of diploma options may affect postschool options.

2. Career Preparatory Experiences

Career preparatory experiences help young people prepare for success in postsecondary education, a career, and/or independent living. Preparatory activities include career awareness, career exploration, and career assessment tied to classroom learning; employability skills training; and work experiences. Appropriate career preparatory experiences allow youth to explore a variety of career opportunities while identifying their career interests, abilities, and potential needs for accommodation and support. Career preparatory activities help young people make the informed decisions necessary for successful transition into careers.

Research shows that preparation for the transition from secondary school to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living must begin well before completion of high school. Career preparation is essential throughout the school experience and can be accomplished in part through career preparatory activities that include both classroom- and community-based experiences. Through these activities young people can explore the types of learning options and experiences needed to develop basic work skills for employment, take courses required for enrollment in postsecondary education and training programs, and acquire the skills necessary for independent living.

Career preparatory experiences acquaint youth with career opportunities by: (a) organizing the curriculum in more meaningful ways; (b) highlighting occupations, career paths, and experiences in the community that youth might otherwise be unaware of; (c) giving youth skills, academic knowledge, and personal competencies required in the workplace and for continued education; and (d) providing youth with personalized opportunities and related skills to meet their individual needs (e.g., budgeting, transportation) (American Youth Policy Forum & Center for Workforce Development, 2000). Schools are not the only organizations that offer career preparatory opportunities. Postsecondary education institutions, community-based organizations, employers, public employment and training agencies, families, and intermediaries also play a role in the career preparation of youth.

Career preparatory activities, such as guest lecturers or field trips to work sites, can start in the elementary grades and continue in a sequence of coordinated and comprehensive activities designed to acquaint young people with a variety of career options. Career preparatory activities in the high school years allow youth to explore specific careers more closely through mentoring, job shadowing, work-based learning, and/or classroom projects that apply academic concepts to careers. Participating in a structured sequence of courses in a career path or major allows deeper exploration of a career area.

Standards and Indicators

2.1	**Youth participate in career awareness, exploration, and preparatory activities in school- and community-based settings.**
2.1.1	Schools and community partners offer courses, programs, and activities that broaden and deepen youths' knowledge of careers and allow for more informed postsecondary education and career choices.

2.1.2	Career preparatory courses, programs, and activities incorporate contextual teaching and learning.
2.1.3	Schools, employers, and community partners collaboratively plan and design career preparatory courses, programs, and activities that support quality standards, practices, and experiences.
2.1.4	Youth and families understand the relationship between postsecondary education and career choices, and the role of financial and benefits planning.
2.1.5	Youth understand how community resources, non-work experiences, and family members can assist them in their role as workers.
2.2	**Academic and non-academic courses and programs include integrated career development activities.**
2.2.1	Schools offer broad career curricula that allow youth to organize and select academic, career, and/or technical courses based on their career interests and goals.
2.2.2	With the guidance of school and/or community professionals, youth use a career planning process (e.g., assessments, career portfolio, etc.) incorporating their career goals, interests, and abilities.
2.2.3	Career preparatory courses, programs, and activities align with labor market trends and up-to-date job requirements.
2.2.4	Career preparatory courses, programs, and activities provide the basic skills needed for success in a career field and the prerequisites for further training and professional growth.
2.3	**Schools and community partners provide youth with opportunities to participate in meaningful school- and community-based work experiences.**

2.3.1	Youth participate in high-quality work experiences that are offered to them prior to completing high school (e.g., apprenticeships, mentoring, paid and unpaid work, service learning, school-based enterprises, on-the-job training, internships, etc.).
2.3.2	Work experiences are relevant and aligned with each youth's career interests, postsecondary education plans, goals, skills, abilities, and strengths.
2.3.3	Youth participate in various on-the-job training experiences, including community service (paid or unpaid) specifically linked to school credit or program content.
2.3.4	Youth are able to access, accept, and use individually needed supports and accommodations for work experiences.
2.4	**Schools and community partners provide career preparatory activities that lead to youths' acquisition of employability and technical skills, knowledge, and behaviors.**
2.4.1	Youth have multiple opportunities to develop traditional job preparation skills through job-readiness curricula and training.
2.4.2	Youth complete career assessments to identify school and postschool preferences, interests, skills, and abilities.
2.4.3	Youth exhibit understanding of career expectations, workplace culture, and the changing nature of work and educational requirements.
2.4.4	Youth demonstrate that they understand how personal skills and characteristics (e.g., positive attitude, self-discipline, honesty, time management, etc.) affect their employability.
2.4.5	Youth demonstrate appropriate job-seeking behaviors.

3. Youth Development and Youth Leadership

Youth development is a process that prepares a young person to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood and achieve his or her full potential. Youth development is promoted through activities and experiences that help youth develop social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies. *Youth leadership* is part of the youth development process and supports the young person in developing: (a) the ability to analyze his or her own strengths and weaknesses, set personal and vocational goals, and have the self-esteem, confidence, motivation, and abilities to carry them out (including the ability to establish support networks in order to fully participate in community life and effect positive social change); and (b) the ability to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence the opinions and behaviors of others, and serve as a role model (Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998).

Conditions that promote healthy youth development are supported through programs and activities in schools and communities. Youth development researchers and practitioners emphasize that effective programs and interventions recognize youths' strengths and seek to promote positive development rather than addressing risks in isolation. Youth who are constructively involved in learning and doing and who are connected to positive adults and peers are less likely to engage in risky or self-defeating behaviors.

Providing the conditions for positive youth development is a responsibility shared by families, schools, and communities. The conditions for healthy youth development reside in families, schools, and communities.

Families promote healthy youth development when they:

- provide support;
- have positive family communication;
- are involved in their adolescent's school;
- have clear rules and consequences and monitor their adolescent's whereabouts;
- provide positive, responsible role models for other adults, adolescents, and siblings;

- expect their adolescent to do well; and
- spend time together.

Schools promote healthy youth development when they:

- expect commitment from youth;
- have a caring school climate;
- have clear rules and consequences;
- provide positive, responsible adult role models; and
- expect youth to do well.

Communities promote healthy youth development when:

- adults advocate for youth;
- neighbors monitor youths' behavior;
- adults model positive, responsible, and healthy behavior;
- youth model positive, responsible, and healthy behavior; and
- youth programs are available (Konopka Institute, 2000, pp. 3-4).

It is unusual for all these positive influences to be present at the same time; unfortunately, too many youth grow up in circumstances that provide limited support for healthy development.

Well-designed and well-run youth development programs promote youth leadership by involving youth in needs assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation. A growing number of organizations include youth on their boards of directors. Effective programs engage all participating youth in constructive action through activities such as service learning, arts, and athletics; and emphasize common values such as friendship, citizenship, and learning.

Research on factors promoting resilience in youth at risk has shown that the consistent presence of a single caring adult can have a significant positive impact on a young person's growth and development (Garmezy, 1993). Well-designed programs promote positive relationships with both peers and adults (National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, 2004).

Standards and Indicators

3.1	Youth acquire the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that enable them to learn and grow in self-knowledge, social interaction, and physical and emotional health.
3.1.1	Youth are able to explore various roles and identities, promoting self-determination.
3.1.2	Youth participate in the creative arts, physical education, and health education programs in school and the community.
3.1.3	Youth are provided accurate information about reproductive health and sexuality, and have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss sexual attitudes.
3.1.4	Youth develop interpersonal skills, including communication, decision-making, assertiveness, and peer refusal skills, and have the ability to create healthy relationships.
3.1.5	Youth interact with peers and have a sense of belonging.
3.1.6	Youth participate in a variety of teamwork and networking experiences.
3.1.7	Youth have significant positive relationships with mentors, positive role models, and other nurturing adults.
3.2	Youth understand the relationship between their individual strengths and desires and their future goals, and have the skills to act on that understanding.
3.2.1	Youth develop ethical values and reasoning skills.
3.2.2	Youth develop individual strengths.
3.2.3	Youth demonstrate the ability to set goals and develop a plan.
3.2.4	Youth participate in varied activities that encourage the development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills.

3.3	Youth have the knowledge and skills needed to practice leadership and participate in community life.
3.3.1	Youth learn specific knowledge and skills related to leadership, and explore leadership styles.
3.3.2	Youth learn the history, values, and beliefs of their communities.
3.3.3	Youth demonstrate awareness, understanding, and knowledge of other cultures and societies and show respect for all people.
3.3.4	Youth engage in experiential learning and have opportunities for genuine leadership, taking primary responsibility for developing plans, carrying out decisions, and solving problems.
3.3.5	Youth participate in service to others in their community, their country, and their world.
3.3.6	Youth identify and use resources in their community.
3.4	Youth demonstrate the ability to make informed decisions for themselves.
3.4.1	Youth practice self-management and responsible decision-making that reflects healthy choices.
3.4.2	Youth demonstrate independent living skills.

4. Family Involvement

Family involvement serves to promote and support the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth. Successful family involvement relies on meaningful collaboration among youth, families, schools, employers, and agencies.

The definition of family must be inclusive of and respectful of each child's family structure, and therefore should not be limited to just parents or legal guardians and children in the home. For example, a family may also include new spouses and partners of parents, extended families (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.), step-relatives, or any other person a youth or family unit considers a family member.

In recent years there has been a significant shift in how schools and communities conceptualize family involvement, from an earlier focus on how families could support schools and community systems to a current orientation toward what schools and communities can do to support families. The goal is to develop partnerships with families that nurture and support all children to learn and grow. Successful partnerships reflect an understanding of the great diversity among families and differences in cultural and socioeconomic conditions. An individualized approach to including families helps build strong connections that improve outcomes for youth.

A family's involvement in their child's education is recognized by many as the single most important factor in school success and achievement. Research has shown that not only does family involvement increase academic achievement, as reflected in higher test scores and graduation rates, but it also increases the likelihood that youth will pursue higher education (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Successful family involvement:

- is championed by the school's principal and implemented by administrators, teachers, and staff;
- nurtures a young person's interests;
- provides for individualized choices; and
- includes family-staff partnerships at the classroom and programmatic levels.

On a practical level, "involvement" often means getting families to participate in an activity with their adolescent at school or in the community. However, due to the wide range of barriers and individual differences, schools and communities should allow for and promote participation in various ways, at different levels of commitment, and at different frequencies. The most effective family involvement approaches:

- offer a wide variety of ways to participate;
- support family participation in any school or community opportunity;
- account for cultural and individual differences;
- enable participation for all who want to contribute, regardless of skill level; and
- provide support to improve participation skills.

Standards and Indicators

4.1	**School staff members demonstrate a strong commitment to family involvement and understand its critical role in supporting high achievement, access to postsecondary education, employment, and other successful adult outcomes.**
4.1.1	School programs and activities provide a range of opportunities for family involvement and actively engage families and youth in the home, classroom, school, and community.
4.1.2	School programs and activities are designed, implemented, and shaped by frequent feedback from youth and families.
4.1.3	School staff development includes training on youth and family involvement based on individual strengths, interests, and needs.
4.1.4	Youth and families have clear and accessible information regarding school curricula, the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress, the proficiency levels students are expected to meet, and how these relate to postsecondary choices.

4.2	**Communication among youth, families, and schools is flexible, reciprocal, meaningful, and individualized.**
4.2.1	Youth, families, and school staff use the telephone, face-to-face meetings, electronic communications, and other methods as needed to support and enhance communication.
4.2.2	School staff individualize communication methods used with youth and families to meet unique needs, including provision of text materials in alternate formats and non-English languages.
4.2.3	Youth, families, and school staff share reports of positive youth behavior and achievement.
4.2.4	Schools, families, and youth enhance communication through participation in school programs that improve literacy and communication skills.
4.3	**School staff actively cultivate, encourage, and welcome youth and family involvement.**
4.3.1	School staff use formal processes to help youth and families identify their strengths and needs, and to connect them with other youth and families for support, guidance, and assistance.
4.3.2	School staff provide flexible meeting arrangements to accommodate the varied needs of youth and families, addressing childcare needs, transportation needs, language barriers, and families' work schedules.
4.3.3	Youth, families, and school staff participate in training on parenting, childcare, and positive family-child relationships.
4.3.4	School staff participate in training on creating a welcoming school climate and working collaboratively, respectfully, and reciprocally with youth and families.
4.3.5	School informational materials, training, and resources reflect the diversity of the community.

4.3.6	School staff provide referrals to community programs and resources that meet the individual needs of youth and families and allow youth and families to make informed choices.
4.4	**Youth, families, and school staff are partners in the development of policies and decisions affecting youth and families.**
4.4.1	Youth, families, and school staff jointly develop a family involvement policy and agreement outlining shared responsibility for improved student achievement and achieving the state's high standards.
4.4.2	School staff regularly share information about school improvement, policies, and performance data with youth and families in a variety of formats.
4.4.3	School staff ensure school policies respect the diversity of youth and family cultures, traditions, values, and faiths found within the community.
4.4.4	School staff provide youth and families with training on school policies, budgets, and improvement initiatives to ensure effective participation in decision-making.
4.4.5	Youth and families have a variety of opportunities to participate in decision-making, governance, evaluation, and advisory committees at the school and community levels.

5. Connecting Activities

Connecting activities are the services, accommodations and supports that help youth gain access to and achieve success within chosen postschool options. Postschool options may include postsecondary education, community service, employment, mental and physical health care, access to transportation, access to financial planning advice and management, and participation in leisure or recreational activities, as well as a number of other adult roles.

Most youth use informal sources of support such as family, friends, community education programs, recreation programs, and employers. Other youth, including many youth with disabilities and at-risk youth, may require assistance and support from public and private organizations, agencies, and programs. Federal and state laws require the provision of individualized services to certain youth, including youth with disabilities, youth in the juvenile justice system, homeless youth, and others. For these youth, receiving appropriate assistance requires service coordination, which is a structured, cooperative effort among organizations and agencies to effectively and efficiently provide services to those who qualify for them.

Organizations and agencies each have a mission and focus for their work and may have specified groups they are legally required to serve, or audiences that they seek to serve. In order for youth to access connecting activities, organizations and agencies must work cooperatively and have clarity concerning their own and each others' responsibilities for providing services.

Standards and Indicators

5.1	**Organizations coordinating services and supports align their missions, policies, procedures, data, and resources to equitably serve all youth and ensure the provision of a unified flexible array of programs, services, accommodations, and supports.**
5.1.1	At the state and community level, public and private organizations communicate, plan, and have quality assurance processes in place within and across organizations to equitably support youths' access to chosen postschool options. Each organization has clear roles and responsibilities, and ongoing evaluation supports continuous improvement.
5.1.2	Organizations have missions, policies, and resources that support seamless linkages and provide youth with access to needed services and accommodations.
5.1.3	Organizations provide, or provide access to, seamlessly linked services, supports, and accommodations as necessary to address each youth's individual transition needs.
5.1.4	Organizations have implemented an agreed-upon process to coordinate eligibility and service provision requirements, helping youth to participate in the postschool options of their choice.
5.1.5	Organizations have shared data systems in place, or have established processes for sharing data, while fully maintaining required confidentiality and obtaining releases as needed. These systems include provisions for collecting and maintaining data on postschool outcomes.

5.2	Organizations connect youth to an array of programs, services, accommodations, and supports, based on an individualized planning process.
5.2.1	Organizations inform all youth about the need to plan for the transition from high school, and the programs and services available to them.
5.2.2	Organizations use an interagency team process to share decision-making with youth and families, linking each youth to the services, accommodations, and supports necessary to access a mutually agreed-upon range of postschool options.
5.2.3	Youth report satisfaction with the services, accommodations, and supports received as they connect to chosen postschool options.

5.3	Organizations hire and invest in the development of knowledgeable, responsive, and accountable personnel who understand their shared responsibilities to align and provide programs, services, resources, and supports necessary to assist youth in achieving their individual postschool goals.
5.3.1	Personnel (e.g., general and special education teachers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, service coordinators, case managers) are adequately prepared to work with transition-aged youth, understand their shared responsibilities, and use coordination and linkage strategies to access resources, services, and supports across systems to assist youth in achieving their postschool goals.
5.3.2	Organizations hire well-prepared staff; provide ongoing professional development; and have a set of common competencies and outcome measures that hold personnel accountable for their role in ensuring that youth are prepared for, linked to, and participating in activities that will assist them in achieving their postschool goals.
5.3.3	Youth and families report satisfaction with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of personnel they encounter in collaborating organizations during the transition process.

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Member Organizations

Alliance for Excellent Education
American School Counselor Association
American Youth Policy Forum
The Arc of the United States
Association for Career and Technical Education
Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired
Association on Higher Education and Disability
Center for Workforce Development, Institute for Educational Leadership
Center for Workforce Preparation, U.S. Chamber of Commerce
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Chief State School Officers
Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation
Healthy & Ready to Work National Center
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Alliance of Black School Educators
National Alliance on the American High School
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of Service and Conservation Corps
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of Workforce Boards
National Association of Workforce Development Professionals
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National Rehabilitation Association
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