Action Planning

Action planning is one way to facilitate responsibility transfer in the collaboration process. *Responsibility transfer* is the process of aligning services for students to ensure uninterrupted transition service delivery. When considering effective collaborative partnerships across school and community environments, it is necessary to ensure all stakeholders have a common mission and vision, including a strong commitment to support youth with disabilities through the transition process (Noonan, 2014; Noonan, Gaumer-Erickson, & Morningstar, 2013).

Action planning provides a framework to evaluate, improve, and expand transition programs for all youth with disabilities. A school-level team that collaborates on an action plan to provide integrated services towards a common goal will present a united front when developing relationships with community service providers.

There are a number of factors that must be considered when collaborating on behalf of youth with disabilities, including flexible scheduling, administrative support, relationship building, training faculty and staff, and disseminating information (Noonan, Morningstar, & Gaumer-Erickson, 2008). Although formal intra-agency agreements typically are unnecessary, it is important to develop action plans with school personnel to help guide day-to-day activities so the plan can support youth throughout the transition process.

Action planning is one strategy that can help teams attain their goals and is a process that results in a written plan. It should provide a framework to evaluate, improve, and expand transition programs for all youth with disabilities. Having an action plan in place can help facilitate relationships between families and school personnel, while minimizing barriers (Flexer, Baer, Luft, & Simmons, 2013). Further, a school-level team that collaborates on an action plan to provide integrated services toward a common goal will present a united front when developing relationships with community service providers. Through action planning, stakeholders can identify the effective characteristics of transition programs while also highlighting which students' transition needs are not being met (Noonan, 2014). Action planning should result in the development of a strategy for improving transition programs, practices, and services across the school and district.

Action planning is the "process that guides the day-to-day activities of an organization or project" (Shapiro, 2013, p. 4), and it typically encompasses five major action elements: identifying what needs to be achieved (i.e., the goal or goals), identifying steps that must be implemented to achieve the goal or goals, establishing a timeline for completion of each step, identifying who is responsible for making sure the step is completed, and identifying the resources required to complete each step (Kohler & Coyle, 2009; National Post-School Outcomes Center, 2013; Noonan, 2014; Shapiro, 2013; Test, Aspel, & Everson, 2006).

Prior to beginning action planning, however, it is essential for the school-level team to identify a framework for the work. Shapiro (2013) suggested six key components that should be in place prior to beginning the action planning process:

1. Establish a clear vision and understanding of the problem. What is the team's expectation for youth with disabilities to ensure a successful transition into adult life? What problems exist related to providing effective transition programs, practices, and services to youth with disabilities?

2. Establish a set of values to guide the work of the team. What outcomes does the team anticipate for youth with disabilities? What does the team hope to achieve?

3. Develop a clear mission statement. The mission statement should provide information about the goal of the team, how the team plans to accomplish the goal, and who will benefit from the plan (e.g., teachers, families, students).

4. Develop an overarching goal. The overarching goal should identify the specific problems that the team will address throughout the process (e.g., decrease the number of youth who are not engaged in the community after high school).

5. Define the purpose of the project. The purpose should include what the team plans to accomplish in the short- and midterm, including identifying specific objectives (e.g., increase the number youth participating in the transition planning process).

6. Identify key result areas. This should include expected results for specific objectives (e.g., increase professional development or implement evidence-based strategies).

Once this groundwork has been laid, it is time to develop an action plan to evaluate strengths, needs, and priorities for change in the school or district's secondary transition programs and practices. Any action that is identified as necessary must be specific, observable, and measurable. Further, the team must provide adequate detail to determine when the action step has been implemented.

In the first step of action planning, the team should develop a SMART goal (i.e., a goal that is specific, measurable, achievable, results focused, and time-bound; see Figure 4.4). A SMART goal should be started within 3 months, and the expectation is that it can be accomplished within 6 months to 1 year. The team should focus on what the school or district can accomplish over the course of a year to lay a strong foundation and prioritize a specific transition area (e.g., career awareness, parent involvement, self-advocacy or self-determination, community experiences, interagency collaboration, program of study).

Figure 4.4. The SMART Goals Model				
S	**M**	**A**	**R**	**T**
Specific	**Measurable**	**Achievable**	**Results focused**	**Time bound**
The activity must clearly state *what* is to be achieved, *by whom, where,* and *when*. It may also state *why* it is important that the activity is achieved.	The activity must clearly state how to evaluate whether the activity has been achieved. Think of the questions: *How much? How many? How often? How effective?* The goal is to measure change over time.	The activity must be achievable within the political climate, resources, and commitment of the SEA (e.g., provide additional development with current allotment of professional development days).	The activity must focus on outcomes (e.g., in-school or postschool outcomes of youth with disabilities) not the process.	The activity must clearly identify the timeline in which the activity is to be completed. This can include benchmarks and target date of completion (e.g., month/year).

Note. SEA = state education agency.