



Transcript of NCSET Conference Call Presentation

Career Planning Begins with Assessment

presented by:

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Ms. Mack: Hello. I'm Mary Mack and I want to welcome you to this month's national teleconference call, "Career Planning Begins with Assessment." Our speakers today are Joe Timmons, Project Coordinator for the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability/Youth (NCWD/Y) and Mary Podmostko, Senior Project Associate for NCWD/Y. Their presentation will take about 45 minutes and then there'll be an opportunity for questions and answers. The teleconference today also has a PowerPoint on the NCSET Web site, <http://www.ncset.org/>, and then click on Teleconferences. There's a link to Joe and Mary's PowerPoint presentation that you can follow along with.

With that I will start by introducing Mary. Mary is a Senior Associate for NCWD/Y at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL). Mary has 16 years of experience managing apprenticeship job training partnerships at programs in school—work programs for both youth and adults including those with disabilities. And she's currently working on a doctorate in Transition/Special Education at George Washington University in Washington, DC where she's completed a Master's degree in Collaborative Vocational Evaluation.

Joe Timmons has been a project coordinator for NCWD/Y for three years and he works at the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota. He's worked with and supported youth and adults with disabilities as a teacher and a counselor/program administrator and he has a Master's degree in Rehabilitation Teaching from Western Michigan University. His writing and research have focused on transition issues related to assessment, mentoring, and learning disabilities. So with that I'll turn it over to Mary.

Ms. Podmostko: Okay. Thank you very much, Mary.¹ The title of this presentation is "***Career Planning Begins with Assessment.***" That is

actually the title of our assessment guide for professionals serving youth with educational and career development challenges. Joe and I are going to walk you through the Guide and if you want to look at that guide online you can do that as well. Or some of you may already have a copy. But we're pretty much going to go through it. The Guide was developed by NCWD/Y. There are seven partners in the Collaborative of which the National Center for Secondary Education and Transition and the Center for Workforce Development at IEL are two.

Just a little background on how we got into this. NCWD/Y is a technical assistance center for the youth grantees funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy in the U.S. Department of Labor. The purposes of the youth grants are to improve outcomes for youth with disabilities, to increase the number of youth with disabilities served in the Workforce Development System, and to implement some systems change at the state and local levels that will improve services for youth.

Four years ago when the TA Center was first funded, we started having conference calls with the first-round grantees and almost the first thing that came up for both types of grantees that we were serving at the time was career assessment.² ***Why assessment?*** The best decisions and choices made by transitioning youth are based on sound information that includes appropriate assessments focused on the talents, knowledge, skills, interests, values, and aptitudes of each individual. And through the Guide and proper training, understanding the role of assessment will enhance the quality of services at the local level, strategic planning at state and local levels, and results for youth.

³ As I mentioned before ***the Guide*** is available on the Collaborative Web site. Our site is fully accessible and Section 508 compliant.

⁴ In order to understand how the Guide is pre-

Superscript numbers refer to the slide of the accompanying PowerPoint being discussed.

*Slide titles are indicated by the **bold italic** type.*

sented, here are the *premises that support the guide*.

1. First of all, we use a very broad definition of “assessment.” The definition we use is that assessment is the process of collecting data for the purpose of making decisions. So we’re not just talking about paper and pencil or a computerized test.
2. We also believe firmly in person-centered career planning which means that it’s a process that should be individually driven by youth’s desires, needs, and goals, and asset-based which means that you look at the youth’s assets—what they can do—and not dwell on what they cannot do. The goal of the career plan would be to identify goals and objectives and a specific action plan to achieve them. And the youth and his/her family—and you can define the family any way you want, whether it’s a traditional family or guardian, grandmother, grandfather, or whatever—the family and the youth should be active participants in the planning process, which means for youth with disabilities, obviously, that self-determination is a prime consideration.
3. Everything that NCWD/Y does is based on the belief that what works for all youth works for youth with disabilities. Youth with disabilities are first and foremost youth—youth who have needs, wants, and dreams just like any other young adult. Their career plan should be based on those individual particular needs—and in the case of youth with disabilities, their accommodation needs, such as assistive technology or other supports.
4. Probably the signature document for NCWD/Y is its “Guideposts for Success” which reflects the fact that youth need more than just academic and vocational preparation. And this document, which I’ll get into in a little bit more detail in a minute, delineates what those needs are.
5. For the Guide we have defined youth as ages 14-25. I think we all know by now that the maturation process goes on well into one’s twenties and for some of us probably beyond that. That’s reflected not only in brain and other physiological research but also in the state and federal funding that supports some youth development activities.

⁵ There are five *Guideposts for Success* listed here. And if you’re familiar with the NASET Transi-

tion Standards and Indicators these are perfectly aligned. So the Guidepost:

1. School-Based Preparatory Experiences aligns with the Schooling category of the NASET standards;
2. Career Preparation and Work-based Learning Experiences aligns with Career Preparatory Experiences;

and so on down the line. And both the standards from NASET and “The Guideposts for Success” are based on research. The research basis, which we get a lot of questions about when we present the Guideposts, is available on the NASET Web site (<http://www.nasetalliance.org/>) as part of the NASET Transition Toolkit. So you can access those there if you’re interested. Basically what the Guideposts say—and I’m not going to go through them line by line but they basically say that all youth need academic programs that are based on clear state standards, career and technical education programs that are based on professional and industry standards, curricula and program options based on universal design of school work, and community-based learning experiences and learning environments that are small and safe, supports from highly qualified staff, access to an assessment system that includes multiple measures, graduation standards that include options, and the involvement and support of family members and other caring adults.

Youth with disabilities may also need individual transition plans that drive instruction and academic support and specific and individual learning accommodations. If you’re looking at the Guideposts in the Assessment Guide you’ll notice that the current version only has four and the Family Involvement and Supports guidepost is not listed. It will be added in the revised edition. That will be coming out shortly. And the full Guideposts are available on the Collaborative Web site just as all of our documents are.

And just a preview of coming attractions: we’re also working on specific guideposts for youth with learning disabilities, youth with mental health needs, and youth who are in the foster care system. And at this point I’ll turn this over to Joe.

Mr. Timmons: Thanks, Mary. ^{6,7} *Guiding Principles for Assessment* are ideas or issues that came up as we were preparing the manual. As we discussed it, we decided that these particular prin-

principles are essential or important whenever you're dealing with an individual who is in career planning or any type of vocational programming.

- Our first principle is that self-determination based on informed choices is an overriding goal for any activities that you do with the youth with a disability. Self-determination includes self-advocacy, self-reliance, and self-understanding. These skills have to be incorporated into the work that is done with an individual. You're just not born with these skills. You have to learn them and have a good handle on them as you go through assessment.
- Assessment is a dynamic process. It's not an end to itself. If you're spending any time in high school working with youth you know that they get assessed, they do activities, they have classes—it's an ongoing thing. And it needs to continue into the postsecondary or vocational aspects of a life of an individual after they leave school.
- Often the purpose and goals of assessment are not made clear to the youth or to his/her family. That's essential so that the whole team that's working with the youth has an understanding of what the assessments are for and how they can help the person do career planning.
- Assessment should be integrated into a larger plan of individualized services—all the people on the youth's team need to have to have an understanding of what assessments are being done so they can put it together with the youth and his/her family.
- Assessment should include environmental factors. That especially talks about the individual needs that a youth has for accommodations when they're taking assessments but also accommodations when they're doing work experiences, in the classroom, and so on, and the same with assistive technology. Many assessments have provisions for accommodations or the use of assistive technology. But research has to be done to ensure that those are individualized and fit into the whole scheme of the individual's plan. Also, accommodations should be implemented by people who know the individual well.
- Formal assessments should be carefully chosen

with attention to their documented reliability and validity. Validity is the extent to which a test measures what its authors or users claim it measures. Specifically, test validity concerns the appropriateness of inferences that can be made on the basis of test results. And reliability—a reliable test provides consistent results over time. In other words, students with the same reading level who take a reading test would have very similar if not identical scores on the test regardless of when they take it, assuming that their reading levels did not change over time.

- Formal assessments should be administered and interpreted by qualified personnel.
- Assessment reports should be written in language that is easily understandable by the youth, his/her parents, and others who may not be professionals in giving assessments.
- Finally, assessment activities should be a positive and empowering process. We believe that assessment activities should screen youth *into* programs, *into* training, *into* academic preparations—not out of them.

⁸ ***Organization of the Guide.*** There are four chapters in the Guide: Understanding the Terrain of Assessment, The Dynamics of Disabilities, Selecting and Using Assessments, and The Organizational Perspective and the some Appendixes and Quick Reference charts and sample forms that can be used by individual teachers, counselors, or others who work with youth.

1. "Understanding the Terrain of Assessment" goes into detail with regard to the "Guideposts of Success" and talks about the needs that youth have, both in secondary and postsecondary settings.
2. "The Dynamics of Disabilities" goes into detail concerning the regulations and laws concerning youth with disabilities, including IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), the Workforce Investment Act, the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. You are probably aware that when a youth is in secondary school they're covered by the special education provisions of IDEA, and they're entitled to certain services. When a

youth leaves secondary school the entitlement to services ends and they become eligible for adult-type services. Chapter 2 goes into all the details for those things. And I must mention that there's quite a tension between what secondary schools must provide and what adult services agencies may provide. And it's one of the reasons why there's so much attention being paid to transition these days because often youth exit the public school setting and kind of fall into a hole that takes some time and energy to get out of when it comes to vocational and academic preparation and other things that youth with disabilities need.

3. "Selecting and Using Assessments" goes into much detail about what happens *when a youth enters a program*.⁹ We talk about the beginning of youth being in a program and this can be in a secondary school, a rehabilitation facility, or a workforce center.
 - As soon as the youth walks in the door of a program, that's when assessment starts. And interviews, observations, and record reviews are part of the assessment process and are usually done before any formal or informal testing takes place.
 - Something else that comes into play when a youth enters the program is confidentiality rules and regulations. Privacy and confidentiality must be maintained. And securing information from other agencies that a youth has participated in must be done ethically and legally using signed consent forms when these are needed.
 - Youth service providers, One-Stop Centers, and other entities need to be aware of the non-discrimination requirements of Section 188 of the Workforce Investment Act. These requirements go into detail about the things that are needed to ensure that youth with disabilities receive the same services that all youth receive or are eligible for.
 - Finally, there should be a distinction made between screening and assessment when a youth enters the program. Screening is often done by non-assessment professionals to determine if more specific diagnostic tests, usually given by a specialist, are needed. Screening can be done

for things like chemical health, learning disabilities, and other things like that. Chapter Three of the Assessment Guide goes into greater detail about this. But be aware that screening is not the same as assessment. Care should be taken to make sure that a young person is not screened when he/she should be assessed.

¹⁰ ***Four Domains and Seven Areas of Assessment in Testing.*** Whether a youth is in secondary school or in adult-based service programs they can be assessed or tested in an educational domain, a psychological domain, a vocational domain, or a medical domain. And the seven areas of testing are academic performance or achievement and cognitive abilities which go under the educational domain; cognitive abilities can also go under the psychological domain along with behavioral, emotional, and social assessment. Under the vocational domain you'd find vocational and career interests, job aptitudes and skills, occupation-specific certification which is what you might find if you go on into an apprentice program in plumbing or truck driving or like that. And then seven is the physical and functional capacities assessment or test that can be given to determine if a person is physically able to perform the tasks of a job. Finally, under the medical domain, physical and functional capacities may be assessed by medical professionals or therapists to determine if a person is medically able to do certain jobs or tasks.

¹¹ ***Issues Related to Hidden Disabilities.*** A number of youth—in fact, the largest percentage of youth getting out of school—have hidden disabilities. It's important that people that work with them recognize the need to find out the skills and capacities of these youth. Hidden disabilities include specific learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), mental health or emotional problems such as depression, anxiety disorders, or conduct disorders, and traumatic brain injury. Because of the nature of hidden disabilities, identification of and the assignment of needed interventions and support can be more difficult. Both parents and professionals often have an inadequate understanding of the nature of hidden disabilities or of useful accommodations. Most importantly, youth with hidden disabilities are less likely than others to disclose their disability because they wish to avoid

being stigmatized or labeled. This means that youth with these disabilities may enroll and enter educational training and employment programs without communicating their disability and need for accommodations and special assistance. I also want to note that hidden disabilities are related to chemical health problems because a number of youth with hidden disabilities become drug dependent or alcohol dependent. Also, many chronic illnesses can be considered hidden disabilities even though they may not directly affect a person's physical activity. Chronic illnesses can include asthma, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, cystic fibrosis, spina bifida, Crohn's disease, seizure disorder, cerebral palsy, cancer, HIV/AIDS, some forms of anemia, and lupus.

¹² ***Institutional Assessments.*** These are done usually to groups of youth or individuals and they serve two purposes. First is to determine eligibility for services—to determine if an individual can be eligible for special education services, for special accommodations in college, any number of things. And the second is to document achievement of program goals. And these come into play in such things as the No Child Left Behind Act or the Department of Labor Common Performance Measures. Common Performance Measures are expectations that state agencies and local agencies have to provide certain services and to have successful outcomes for a certain number of their participants.

¹³ When you're ***selecting published tests and assessments*** to use with youth there are eight things to consider. I mentioned validity and reliability earlier, but you also need to consider fairness, how long it takes to administer the test and score it, the qualifications of the test administrator, how easy it is to use, the reporting format, and the cost. As you might expect the time needed to administer and score and the qualifications of the test administrator have a direct impact on the cost of the test. And it's very important that people or organizations try hard to find adequate testing that doesn't cost too much.

¹⁴ The Assessment Guide includes a ***directory of commonly-used published tests*** that gives information about the uses of individual tests, the prices, and other information which we'll mention in a minute. Publishers usually have explicit instructions for timing certain tests but often will include provisions for additional time for individuals with spe-

cific disabilities such as learning disabilities or visual impairment. For some people, tests that take a long time can lead to anxieties that may make scores less valid than those based on shorter tests. For other youth, fatigue becomes a factor. So it's important to consider the individual needs and limitations that a young person might have when it comes to testing.

Test results should be reported in a useful, easy to understand format. The score's interpretive data diagnoses and recommendations should be clearly expressed and understandable. Reports should be available to the young person and/or family members in written form for future reference. That's very important when youth are changing programs or aging out of certain programs.

In the Assessment Guide we currently list over 60 different tests. The updated version that's coming in out a month or so will have 70 different tests. They're indexed by major domain categories—academic, vocational, psychological, and medical—and are also cross-referenced a little bit, for instance: for learning disabilities, for college entrance, and other things like that. Publishers' Web sites are included in this directory and always should be consulted prior to using these tests, especially since the information changes regularly. Target groups refer to ages or grades of intended test takers and they may include some language or disability demographics. Norming information is from the publisher and establishes standardization over a specific population. Many of these tests in our directory are not normed for youth with disabilities but if you contact the publisher they probably can give you more information about that.

It's important to know the qualifications needed to purchase, administer, and interpret a test, and these vary widely. Many publishers will only provide information on reliability and validity with the purchase of testing materials or technical manuals. So if that's an issue, you need to contact them directly and tell them what your interest is in reliability and validity. Many tests come in different formats and have more than one version of the same format. They might come in pencil and paper, they might come online, or some combination of the two. Scoring is also similar. Costs of tests may include manuals, equipment, consumable test booklets, answer sheets, and reporting forms. Some instruments have large up-front costs. Computer-

ized scoring usually means higher prices. And the information included in our directory comes from text directly found in publishers' Web sites with the latest update done this past August.

¹⁵ Here's a *sample entry from the directory*. As you can see, it includes the test name, the Web site, what is measured, and so on. Some publishers provide more information than others. And in our directory some of the spaces you see here may be left empty because the information is not available on the Web but can be secured by contacting the publisher directly. So with that I'll turn the rest over to Mary and look forward to your questions later.

Ms. Podmostko: Okay, thanks, Joe. Before I go on I just wanted to share something from my own personal experience. When I first started doing assessment, to be perfectly honest, I didn't know what I was doing from a technical standpoint, but the thing that saved me was, I was working for a trade association that was trying to get young people into construction apprenticeships that were registered with the Department of Labor. Their goal was to get as many people into the programs as they could. So when we gave an assessment it wasn't used as it is, unfortunately, in other places to tell somebody, "I'm sorry, you don't have an 8th grade reading or math level; we can't let you in." It was to let the person know up front if they didn't have an 8th grade or reading or math level because that's what our textbooks were written at—that they needed to do some brushing up. And to their credit we did have some folks who had particularly low math scores. And none of the instructors ever said to me, "I won't take this young person." They always figured out a way to help that young person meet the goal. And I think having my first assessment experience in that kind of environment really paid off down the line because that's what we're trying to promote with this Assessment Guide—that you're using the assessments to help young people get into the careers, not to close the door on a career.

4. ¹⁶ Chapter 4: *Organizational Considerations*.

Throughout the Guide, we use the term "Youth Service Practitioner" to describe people who work directly with youth. Obviously, the Youth Service Practitioner does not operate in a vacuum. The organization in which they work and the context in which they work needs to respect

what they're doing and to support them.

- The organization or agency—wherever the Youth Service Practitioner works—should have clear policies that guide assessment practice. The Guide provides a number of resources that we've talked about so far—the Assessment Principles, the Guideposts for Success, and so forth to help an organization develop those policies.
- Now obviously, particularly right now, given the budget situation, effective use of existing resources is critical. What a lot of people are realizing is that rather than trying to pull the resources together within their organizations, they need to look outside their organization and see what other resources are available that they can link to from other organizations. You need to carefully manage and plan out your resources and then find out what other people are doing so that you can use the resources in an intelligent way.
- Finally, proper staff preparation in ongoing professional development is critical and should be built into the organization's plan. Unfortunately, we all know that when budgets are tight that's one of the first things to go. But that's really short-sighted.

You also may be interested to know that the Collaborative has a backgrounder on the knowledge, skills, and abilities of Youth Service Practitioners which looks at what the professional development for Youth Service Practitioners is like in the larger workforce development arena. And as a result of that, we're spinning it off into a curriculum that is based on the components that we've identified that are necessary for Youth Service Practitioners to be effective. That curriculum is going through the approval process now. Hopefully it'll be coming out shortly.

¹⁷ So you're a Youth Service Practitioner and you're working in an organization—what can the organization do to *build an assessment infrastructure* that will result in effective assessment and positive results for youth?

- What most people are doing more and more is cross-agency cooperation and collaboration, and you can do this not only at the organizational level but also at the regional level and then

statewide at the agency level. And this is again to maximize the available expertise and funding for youth service delivery.

- In Chapter Four there is a tool that you can use for resource mapping. This term is now becoming very popular. You look at the resources available—in this case for assessment in your area—and identify where the gaps and overlaps are so you can come up with some strategic decisions to streamline and improve the collective capacity in your organization or region or state.
- We also have information on formalizing inter-agency agreements using a document called a Memorandum of Understanding. This document details who is going to do what, how much it'll cost, who is paying for them, where they'll be delivered, and any other additional information that's needed. Obviously funding is a difficult issue to deal with. Back when I was the JTPA director they talked about combining funding, and people have this mental image of throwing your budget into a pot and just having a communal funding pot. And that really didn't work too well because of course people want to protect their funding. And trust issues come into play. So we use the term "braided funding," which is a strategy for maintaining control of your funds but agreeing among the partners in the collaborative how they're going to be used. So in other words, if Vocational Rehabilitation is a partner they may say, "We'll use our funds to do the disability evaluations." If the WIA System One-Stop is a partner they may say, "We'll use our funds to do the career assessments." And then if the public school system is a partner, they may say, "We'll use our funds to do the academic assessments." So you're controlling your own funds but that youth who's going through the system would have access to all of those assessments from the different partners.
- The other reality of the day is that there are very elaborate reporting requirements for federally-funded partners, there are issues relating to data sharing and data management, confidentiality, privacy, and so on which need to be addressed when you're coordinating services. Also issues relating to the eligibility for each of the different partners' programs can be very confusing. So if

you can get those addressed up front it makes things much easier down the line.

¹⁸ *Ethical Practices and Confidentiality/Privacy Issues* that educators and youth service practitioners who select, administer, interpret, and use the results of assessments have to address are listed in the back of Chapter Four.

- The Code of Fair Testing Practices on Education was developed by the Joint Committee on Testing Practices to address developing, selecting, administering, scoring, reporting, and interpreting tests. And although it specifically covers educational testing, the ethical and practical considerations from the Code can be used in any assessment situation. It's a really good guideline to use when you're setting up your organizational policies.
- I'm sure you're familiar by now with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which protects the privacy of student educational records and gives parents certain rights that transfer to the student when either the student reaches the age of 18 or attends postsecondary education. I can still remember my parents' shock when they were paying for my college education and found out that the grades would go to me and not to them. So that can also create some issues. But you need to be aware of those issues.
- The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) has a privacy rule that protects individually identifiable health information. If you've been to the doctor or the dentist recently you know you have to fill out those forms. They have a HIPAA privacy statement. None of your information can be released without your permission and so forth. Again, particularly for a vocational rehabilitation provider who might be working with health records or other entities working with health records, you have to be aware of that.

Also at the end of Chapter Four we have a Code of Professional Ethics and Practices from the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals which can be used as a model for a Code of Ethics. But I know there are quite a few other professional associations out there that have a Code of Ethics which would also be appropriate.

¹⁹ So one of the things that we have tried to do

with the Guide is provide real-world *user-friendly forms and appendices*. Here's a list of some of the things that are included with the Guide:

- The sample release of records form and the personal transition data form are in Chapter One. The sample release of records is a form that a youth or a parent or guardian can complete to release records covered under FERPA, HIPAA, and other agency guidelines. There actually is a check-off for the different agencies that are included in that. The personal transition data form is a form that can be used to collect information when a youth comes into a program or a system, and keep that summary information in one place so you can refer back to it later as needed.
- Joe talked about the difference between screening and assessment. There is a learning needs screening tool that can be used if you're trying to determine if a youth should be referred for a full evaluation of a specific learning disability. And that has been validated.
- In Chapter Four there are the resource mapping tool and the sample interagency data-sharing agreement. The resource mapping tool is just what it sounds like. It's something you can use to help you identify who's doing what among the organizations in your area in terms of assessment, and then you can analyze that information to determine if a certain segment of youth is not being served or if there is an overlap or gap in certain types of assessments that are needed. And then the sample interagency data-sharing agreement is actually a real agreement from the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services that you can use as a model.
- Appendix A includes information on assessments under federal law. This particular appendix looks at the mandated and permitted uses of tests under the law. What we mean by mandated is that that particular assessment or type of assessment is required for all applicants or participants funded by that law. Permitted assessments are those assessments that may be provided for some applicants or participants if appropriate or under certain circumstances. The bottom line here is, can you pay for those assessments? Or must you

pay for those assessments under those particular laws? That appendix is going to be updated with information on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 which has some interesting new provisions about assessment.

- Glossary B is a glossary of terms used in the Guide with all the slides. It's helpful if everybody means the same thing when they're using a term.

²⁰ Our last two slides have information on *NCWD/Y* if you want to go to the Web site or e-mail us or call us with a question. We do have a particular interest in finding out what people need, not only from our grantees but also out in the larger world. Our policy is that if you send a question in or call in a question to NCWD/Y we will try to get back to you. I think it's within 48 or 72 hours. Sometimes the questions are pretty complicated. So we have to do some research. But we will try to get back to you.

We also list the High School/High Tech Web site. That link will actually take you to the High School/High Tech page of NCWD/Y's Web site. And if you're not familiar with High School/High Tech, it's a program for youth with disabilities who are in high school to try to make sure that they get access to information and opportunities in the high tech careers, because a lot of times, unfortunately, they don't have access to those programs.

²¹ The last slide has information on how to contact Joe and me. It's pretty straightforward. The only thing I would say is that it's best to use my e-mail address because even though I do work for IEL which is located in DC, I actually live in Florida. So I'm not always in the office and I try to check the telephone number regularly but if you have an urgent issue the best way to reach me is by e-mail. I think at this point we'd like to throw it open to questions.

Ms. Over: Thank you very much. We are really struggling with the assessment piece here in Vermont. This information is very good. Thank you.

Mr. Timmons: Thank you.

Ms. Garon: Hello, my name is Judy. I am from Cheyenne Eagle Butte School in Eagle Butte, South Dakota. I am a transition specialist here. And obviously I have to assess for transitions. My question to you is, I assume you know about IEPs and things of that sort.

Mr. Timmons: Yes.

Ms. Garon: Okay. And when students come up for a re-eval you know you have to assess within a timeline after the prior notice is sent. Now I complete the assessment, which is ongoing, obviously. And sometimes it's not done within that timeline. How can I meet those timeline guides and use my existing data for assessment?

Mr. Timmons: Well, I'm not an expert on IEPs, but I know that the new IDEA has changed some of the rules for assessment and there is some allowance for waiving re-assessment depending on what the disability is and whether or not the youth and family agree.

Ms. Garon: Okay. So then that has a lot to do I suppose with the functional assessment data that is currently being completed.

Mr. Timmons: Yes. I don't know all the details of it, but I do know that not all of the re-evaluations have to be done on an ongoing basis. It depends on if the needs of the youth have changed or if the functional or academic performance has changed.

Ms. Garon: Thank you.

Mr. Timmons: If you send me an e-mail I probably could do some more research for you on that. I'd like to know more about it myself.

Ms. Garon: Thank you.

Ms. Balduf: This is Lisa Balduf from Iowa. My question is, I see a lot of need in our youth project for the career inventories and everything but I'm also a parent and I can't help feeling that my child without disabilities survived with minimal assessment and I just feel like a lot of people just keep getting assessed, assessed, assessed and they and their outcomes don't really change. Is there any sort of evidence that a lot of assessments lead to better outcomes?

Ms. Mack: I'll take a stab at some of your concerns. I think that when Joe and Mary are talking about assessment they're talking about assessment based on the needs of the young person, not assessment based on a need to verify that a person is illegible for particular services. And there is no question within the disability community—there is a mismatch of those two. However, with young people with disabilities, when we're talking about the needs of the young person it is important to get information that determines what they can do and how they're going to be able to succeed. If you're

going to make an error, it's better, in my opinion, to err slightly on the expectations rather than underestimate expectations. I think it's—part of your question is around the mismatch.

Mr. Timmons: The other problem I see with these things is that individual team members don't have access to the previous records someone else may have had—report cards or assessments or tests. You always need to go back as far as you can and get things that have previously been done so that there isn't duplication of effort and so on.

Ms. Podmostko: I would also add that whoever's doing the assessment needs to stop and think about, number one, why are we doing this assessment? What are we hoping to get out of it? And then, how are the results of the assessment going to be used? At the NCSET Leadership Summit earlier this year we had a youth panel of some really incredible young people. At least two of them talked about how they took a test and then were going to be shunted down a path based on the results of that test. That's not what we're talking about in our career assessment guide. It's to have a reason for giving the test, to look at other things in conjunction with the result of that assessment before you make a decision.

One of the favorite things I used to do when we were working with young folks who didn't have much basis on which to make a career decision is to let them go out and actually do some work experience. If they thought they wanted to try something they could actually go out on to a work site and see what it was like. It's easy to give a person a test and say, "Okay, these are the three categories you'd be good in," and then throw them down that road. They might not want to do that, or the basis on which they made their choices may not have been completely solid. So that's why we say that you need to have a reason for giving the test, you need to use the results appropriately, and, as Joe said, if you already have information on that, you shouldn't re-test someone if you can get information somewhere else.

Ms. Mack: And work experience and job shadowing and other kinds of things are a part of the assessment process.

Mr. Timmons: I meant to stress that earlier—that you can learn so much about a youth by watching him or her in a work setting. It tells much more than what you might often get on a pencil and paper

test when it comes to vocational testing, especially.

Ms. Balduf: Thanks for that clarification.

Ms. Garon: This is Judy in South Dakota again. You just brought up something else. I guess I get confused sometimes because, based upon my parent/student/staff interviews, a lot of times the student is ready to go into the workforce, especially if they're a senior and they possibly are a transfer in or if they've had prior experiences elsewhere, I just like to put them out there and see what they can do and base it on that. But a lot of times the special ed program here at school requires that I do all this formal assessment which is very time consuming. And I am on a reservation. I don't have, sometimes, a lot of good parent input. I have to base it on what I know of the student and how he acts in the field as well as in the classroom.

Ms. Mack: That is a form of assessment.

Ms. Garon: Okay, great. Thank you.

Ms. Podmostko: Right now, given No Child Left Behind and a new requirement in IDEA 2004 that transition services will be based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training education and employment, there's a concern that we're over-testing our youth. Which is why, as Mary and Joe and I've said, observation is a form of assessment, work experience, job shadowing—there are a number of ways you can get very valid information on youth interests and aptitudes and so forth without actually giving them a pen and paper or computerized tests. So you need to use all the avenues that are open to you.

Mr. Timmons: I'm going to add one more thing. There appears to be a cycle going here that academic preparation is more important federally or across the country than vocational preparation is. And I'm not arguing for or against that. But I do know that certain individuals may benefit more from vocational experiences and vocational education than academic preparation. So the individual is the key here. And I can't stress that enough.

Ms. Garon: I agree totally with that. I'm finding that a lot of my students have so many abilities that are hands-on but they have very low functioning reading and writing abilities. But they can do things.

Mr. Timmons: Right. We're also in the process of writing a guide for learning disabilities where we'll address the vocational and social needs

of youth with disabilities and not so much focus on the academic needs because that's been written about many times.

Ms. Mack: Mary or Joe, do have any remarks you'd like to make before we complete the call?

Mr. Timmons: Well, I just want to stress that Mary and I are both part of a technical assistance network and a big part of our job is helping people in schools, school districts, agencies, and states deal with questions related to assessment. And we love to get e-mail and even phone calls. Any time in the future, please contact us if you have questions about assessment or any of the other issues that appear in transition.

Ms. Podmostko: I'd also like to reiterate that the "Career Planning Begins with Assessment" Guide has been flying off the shelves and it's the most downloaded document that we've put out there to date. And it's because we really do listen to peoples' concerns and needs and we try to respond to those. So I repeat what Joe said—if you have questions or issues, if you need information on something, if we can't find it we'll send you to somebody who can.

Ms. Mack: Well, thank you very much, Joe and Mary, and we want to thank all of you who joined us for this informative call. We look forward to talking to you in the future. Thank you.

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