



Families Together, Inc.

Encouraging, Educating and Empowering

February 15, 2018

Representative Davis and members of the Children and Seniors Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I represent Families Together, Inc. a Non-Profit organization which serves Kansas families who have children with disabilities or special health care needs. For more than 35 years, we have encouraged, educated and empowered Kansas families and their sons and daughters with disabilities to be effective members of their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. We are the federally designated Parent Training and Information Center by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Daily our staff assists families and transition age youth (14-21) in understanding and navigating the special education system. We are also the Family-to-Family Health Information Center assisting families of children and youth with special health care as they navigate the maze of health care. In addition, we also have contracts with Kansas Department of Aging and Disability Services (KDADS), and the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE) to assist each of these agencies in serving families of children with disabilities or special health care needs.

Families Together has centers located in Topeka, Wichita, and Garden City. Our staff are parents and/or appointed education advocates of individuals with disabilities. Every day my colleagues and I talk with parents across Kansas regarding concerns related to their child's education. Many parents call us about questions they have regarding their child's transition to adulthood.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal special education law that ensures all children with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education. The IDEA recognizes the importance of preparing youth for success after high school and states that transition planning for students who have a disability and receive special education services must begin by age 16. In Kansas, this planning process must start by the age of 14. Transition planning means evaluating needs, strengths, and skills required for a student to move from high school to postsecondary life.

Transition first appeared in the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1997. Legislators and families realized that without a strong transition plan, students were leaving school without the necessary skills and supports to be successful as adults. Since that time, many efforts have been put into place to help families and schools understand the requirements and implement them. The most recent reauthorization of IDEA included transition assessments to help students explore paths to careers in which they have an interest. The definition of transition includes a strong emphasis on a results oriented process

Serving Parents and Their Sons and Daughters with Disabilities

Home Page:
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Wichita Parent Center
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Wichita, KS 67203-5369
Voice/TDD (316) 945-7747
1-888-815-6364
Fax (316) 945-7795
wichita@families-togetherinc.org

Topeka Parent Center
5611 S.W. Barrington Ct.S,
Suite 120
Topeka, KS 66614
Voice/TDD (785) 233-4777
1-800-264-6343
Fax (785) 233-4787
topeka@families-togetherinc.org

Garden City Parent Center
1518 Taylor Plaza
Garden City, KS 67846-4055
Voice/TDD (620) 276-6364
1-888-820-6364
Español (620) 276-2380
Fax (620) 276-3488
gardencity@families-togetherinc.org

Statewide Spanish Parent Line
1-800-499-9443

with measurable results. The focus is based on movement from school to post-school activities by requiring measurable postsecondary goals in employment, education and where appropriate independent living.

KSDE's new vision Kansas Can states: "a successful Kansas high school graduate has the academic preparation, cognitive preparation, technical skills, employability skills and civic engagement to be successful in postsecondary education, in the attainment of an industry-recognized certification or in the workforce, without the need for remediation." Together Kansans Can defines success as: a successful Kansas high school graduate has the academic preparation, cognitive preparation, technical skills, employability skills and civic engagement to be successful in postsecondary education, in the attainment of an industry-recognized certification or in the workforce, without the need for remediation. To reach this goal students with disabilities need individualized transition services that focus on postsecondary goals in employment, postsecondary education and where appropriate independent living.

Even with requirements in IDEA and the Kansas vision, many students are not receiving the services they need prior to leaving high school to ensure a successful transition to adult life. This legislation would bring parents, agencies, legislative appointees, and the Kansas State Department of Education together with new energy to support parents and youth with disabilities in this critical time in the young person's life.

Families Together recognizes that this bill offers a rare opportunity for agencies and individuals, who are vested in ensuring students with disabilities receive individualized transition services to become integral members of their communities, to come together as a Committee to make progress on this critical issue. This bill will put together a working group in order to make recommendations on transition policy issues and to develop a bill of rights and other materials to help parents and students better navigate the system. Families Together believes that the tasks enumerated in the bill be greatly improve the outcomes for students and their families as they leave Kansas schools and are ready become contributing members of our communities.

It is the position of Families Together that there needs to be more supportive of families and schools to provide transition services that truly help students with disabilities be ready for postsecondary education or work when they exit school.

Please feel free to contact me if you need any clarification or if I can be of additional help.

Respectfully,

Leia Holley, Family Health and Resource Specialist
Families Together, Inc.