

EARLY START TO SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Year One Evaluation Report

Prepared by George Tilson and Annamaria Basile
TransCen, Inc.
March, 2006

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

This external evaluation was contracted to TransCen, Inc. as part of its technical assistance to the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE), focusing on the school to adult life transition of youth receiving special education services. One of the model pilot projects initiated by DDOE in March, 2005 is called “Early Start to Support Employment” (ESSE). The following report presents an evaluation of the first year of implementation of ESSE. It is focused on the processes that took place, accomplishments, challenges, feedback from stakeholders, and recommendations that were suggested by the data. The next evaluation report will examine the extent to which target youth became “meaningfully engaged,” that is, employed, active participants in community activities, independently involved in daily living activities, and/or enrolled in further education/training.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation team used a number of strategies for gathering data in this first year. These included document reviews of all program materials, minutes from advisory committee meetings, monthly reports and correspondence. A sample of key stakeholders was interviewed using an open-ended survey protocol. This instrument, along with all products mentioned in this report, may be found in the DDOE website (www.doe.k12.de.us) under “Transition Services.” Stakeholders included upper level managers of the Delaware Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS) and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), teachers, DDDS case managers, parents of participating youth, DVR counselors, and representatives of adult service agencies.

TARGET POPULATION AND NEED FOR THE PILOT

Over the past few years, interagency collaborative efforts in the transition process have yielded some positive results. However, many students with significant disabilities experience difficult and unsuccessful transitions to adult service options. In response to this, The Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS), the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), and the Department of Education (DDOE) have agreed to pilot a project to align resources that would prevent a gap in services to students needing supported employment services upon leaving school and entering the workforce. The “Early Start to Supported Employment” (ESSE) is intended to demonstrate the feasibility of a more seamless transition for students leaving school and entering the adult workforce. The outcome of paid work with post-school support in place before leaving

school is the primary goal of this pilot. There is a commitment from each primary agency to conduct this pilot over multiple years in order to learn how to more effectively support successful employment outcomes for students requiring long-term adult services.

ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED DURING YEAR ONE

Start-up Activities.

A number of activities took place during the initial months of ESSE that were critical to the development, implementation and oversight of the project. In March, 2005 a pilot meeting was organized with representatives from DDOE, school districts, DDDS, DVR and adult service providers to lay the groundwork for the pilot. As a result of that meeting, student selection criteria, a suggested timeline for pilot activities, and needed materials were developed. DDDS identified an initial pool of 76 students expected to leave school in 2006 who were potentially eligible for supported employment, according to state guidelines. During the first pilot meeting it was recommended that DDOE be the lead agency, and that an ESSE state advisory committee be organized. This stakeholder group includes a facilitator/evaluator, representatives from adult service providers, DDDS, DVR, DDOE and school programs.

The first order of business for the advisory committee was to review a local model that was a precursor to ESSE. This small but important project had been conducted within a school program in Kent County in 2004. The committee sought to identify what had worked in this program, and what aspects had proved challenging. There was unanimous support and enthusiasm for the model and the committee began immediately to develop a detailed timeline for the ESSE pilot.

Numerous project materials were drafted during the first few months of start-up. These included a comprehensive parent handbook, brochures, FAQ fact sheets, fliers, matrix of adult service providers, initial screening tool, and a variety of forms.

Project Leadership and Oversight.

Four state advisory committee meetings were held during year one, the detailed minutes of which indicated substantial input from the multiple perspectives of each member. Agendas of each meeting were concise and clear; they reflected a concerted effort to address specific issues and to guide an action-oriented process. A creative, problem-solving atmosphere was readily apparent. Members had an “agree to disagree” philosophy, which clearly had a positive impact on the implementation of the project.

Mark Chamberlin, Education Associate of DDOE, and Margaret Haas of DDDS served as co-facilitators of the committee. Essentially they staffed the committee, preparing agendas, gathering information, keeping minutes of the meetings, presenting to leadership of their respective organizations, drafting materials, and keeping all parties informed of project activities and timelines.

Outreach Activities.

Within one month of the first pilot project meeting, all district special education directors were informed of the ESSE pilot at statewide and countywide meetings with DDOE as were both the New Castle County and Kent/Sussex Transition Councils. Members of the regional transition councils were requested to inform their schools of the project. DDDS provided DDOE with a list of 76 students aging out of school in June 2006. This information was given to schools where these students were enrolled, so that the initial process of informing the youth and their families could begin.

Initial outreach activities conducted by DDOE included:

- Announcements in the newsletter of the Delaware Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT)
- Meetings with the Kent/Sussex and New Castle County Regional Transition Advisory Councils
- Presentations to the Countywide Special Education Directors and Statewide Special Education Leadership group
- Meetings with Adult Service Providers throughout the State
- Presentation at the 2005 Summer Transition Institute, co-sponsored by DCDT, DDOE and DVR

The ESSE state advisory committee was adamant from the beginning that eligible youth and their families be given every opportunity to exercise informed choice in learning about, then selecting, the adult service agencies who would partner with them and with the schools. To that end, open houses were held in New Castle County and Kent/Sussex Counties in the summer and fall of 2005. From reports of these events and feedback from participants, the open house format proved to be a very effective means of getting out the word about the project, informing youth and families of the unique characteristics of various adult service agencies, and sharing resources. Participants were impressed with the manner in which the events were organized, the convenience and efficiency, and the friendly, welcoming atmosphere that pervaded the open houses. Professionals who attended reported gaining new information themselves, about other agencies and schools, as well as the resources, requirements, regulations and policies of various state agencies.

Eligibility Determination, Youth Selection Process, and Selection of Adult Service Provider Agency

As previously mentioned, the first step in the selection process for participation in ESSE was certification by DDDS that the youth and his/her family had completed the DDDS application process, and had met the eligibility requirements of that agency. Once that determination had been confirmed, the student's school was then notified. The youth and his/her parents were then informed of the project and were asked to complete several basic intake forms which were submitted to DDOE. They were invited to attend an open house, to learn more about the adult service providers in their counties and state. All

youth and their parents/guardians were given the following materials, which were available in both English and Spanish:

- Current Supported Employment Timeline and a Suggested Timeline for ESSE pilot
- Parent Manual on Supported Employment
- Supported Employment Fact Sheet and Brochure
- Initial Student Review Form
- Student/Family Consent Form
- Confirmation Form of Student Participation
- Parents' Frequently Asked Questions

The family's completion of the review and intake forms and selection of an adult service agency would start the project timeline for each student.

It is important to note that all youth and their families were informed that the major emphasis of ESSE was on employment. The expectation was that participating youth would be given extensive work experiences during school hours and that career preparation in the community would take precedence over typical classroom-based learning activities. An important goal of the project was to have youth placed in paid jobs *prior to* their official exit from school. For those parents who did not agree with this expectation, ESSE was deemed not an appropriate fit for their sons/daughters.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN YEAR ONE

The goal of the first year of ESSE was to initiate the model in as many districts as possible statewide, with a cohort of students who were slated to graduate in 2006. This necessitated extensive outreach and promotion activity, identification of eligible youth, enrollment of these youth, selection by the families of adult service agency partners, and extensive collaboration among diverse entities (schools, state agencies, and community-based organizations). All of these activities were accomplished in year one. In addition, a second cohort, consisting of 2007 graduates was identified and entered the project pipeline. Following are highlights of the accomplishments of year one.

- A state advisory committee was established; four meetings were conducted, with extensive activity implemented by committee members, including outreach, development of materials, developing timelines, negotiating cross-agency communications and problem-solving.
- Extensive outreach was conducted targeting state and district special education leadership personnel, leadership and line personnel of stakeholder state agencies, county transition councils, school district administrators, educators, youth and families, and adult service agencies.
- First cohort of ESSE youth (class of 2006) was identified. This cohort consisted of 18 students from 8 schools.

- As of the time of this report, 16 youth continue their participation in ESSE. One dropped out of school, and one left due to health issues.
- Second cohort of ESSE youth (class of 2007) was identified, consisting of 22 students from 11 schools.
- Four open houses were held (two in New Castle County, two in Kent/Sussex Counties). The majority of eligible students and their families attended. There was excellent representation by adult service provider agencies.
- For the first cohort, 8 adult service provider agencies were selected by 18 youth and their families. Representatives of these agencies subsequently met with these youth and families and with their school partners.
- 15 of 16 youth have been approved for DVR funding and are currently involved in, or have completed the DVR assessment process.
- Four of 16 youth are currently in the job development phase.
- Two of the 16 have secured employment through their school programs and will receive follow-along supports through DDDS.
- The original project timeline was modified by the state advisory committee to address emerging challenges. This revised timeline is more responsive to the realities of project implementation – while still maintaining high expectations and clear benchmarks.

The reader will note there were numerous examples where problems with the timeline/process were brought to the attention of the advisory committee which then sought to ascertain the causes of the problem and propose solutions. (Examples are highlighted in the “Challenges” section.)

STAKEHOLDER RESPONSES TO YEAR ONE SURVEY

Surveys were distributed via email or in person to 53 stakeholders. Twenty-six individuals subsequently completed and returned the surveys, for a response rate of 49%. The group of 26 respondents was comprised of 10 parents, 2 DVR counselors, 5 teachers, 3 DDDS case managers, 4 adult service agency representatives, and 2 administrators from state agencies. Given the small sample, responses have been summarized and are presented according to several themes.

Parents.

On the subject of outreach and how well they were informed of the program and its components, all of the parents stated they were given information in a timely and clear manner. The parents specifically mentioned such things as “verbal communications,”

“handouts,” “handbooks,” “meetings” and “telephone conversations.” All of the parent respondents participated in the Open Houses and spoke highly of the organization and positive atmosphere of these events. One parent noted “My son is a very shy young man. At the Open House he was quite relaxed and even participated in discussions, which really surprised me.”

Several parents did offer suggestions for how to improve the outreach process. “It would be helpful to have some kind of a flow chart that outlines the process and who is responsible for what.” Another mentioned a need for phone numbers and contact information for each of the people involved with their sons and daughters through ESSE. Two parents expressed the opinion that the process was “slow-moving” and that in some cases it was unclear as to who was responsible for the coordination of information; however, both acknowledged this might have been due to the fact that this was a new project. These same parents said they valued the “thoroughness” of all the partner representatives.

Overall, the parents who responded to this survey seemed extremely enthusiastic about the ESSE pilot project and optimistic about the benefits for their young adult children. According to one of the parents: “Just to know that so many people are pulling for my daughter, at this critical time in her life, is encouraging. It will be nice knowing things are in place early, rather than after she has left the safety of school.”

Professionals.

Outreach to Professionals.

Professionals working directly with the students and their families were asked the extent to which they were informed about the project and the manner in which they received the information. The majority of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the manner in which they were informed about the project, citing such examples as repeated contact with their DDDS coordinators, the DDOE state-level representative, and their managers. The written program descriptions, parent guide, and timeline were specifically mentioned by a number of respondents. Two respondents reported their dissatisfaction with the manner in which they were informed. One stated: “It was never made clear to me the channels of communication that were to be followed, who was in charge and so on. It seemed the timeline was unrealistic.” One person said they were confused by how the funding would work, with regards to the “DDDS – DVR handoff and vice versa.”

Difference Between ESSE and Typical Supported Employment Programs.

When asked how they felt the ESSE model differed from other supported employment programs with which they were familiar, most of the respondents referred to such things as “this program makes good use of the critical transition year for students. The process allows schools to participate in more concrete ways and enhances the transition curriculum with very practical experiences (i.e., visits to providers, practice Paratransit, etc.)” The following quote summed up the thoughts of the majority of

respondents. “The most and prominent difference is the opportunity to work with individuals while still in school. This gives us invaluable information from teachers, counselors and other school supports. It also allows us to work with the students while they are still in a routine. In the past we have had problems with people who came into our system after sitting at home for two to three months after they graduated. It is hard for them to get back in the habit of getting up early and having to be somewhere at a certain time. Parents have also expressed to us their dissatisfaction with prior systems in this respect.” Several case managers cited the benefits of having the support of educators who knew the students very well. “Working with the school programs on a more intimate level has been wonderful.”

Three professionals felt there was no difference between the ESSE model and the typical supported employment programs and expressed some skepticism, as in the following quote: “There are going to be lots of problems figuring out the work and school schedules of the students. And the timelines are a recipe for disaster.”

Effectiveness of ESSE Open Houses.

All but two of the professional respondents attended the ESSE Open Houses. Overwhelmingly, those who attended expressed a high level of satisfaction with the events. Some of the quotes are indicative of this. “Very positive experience for everyone. For school staff, it reinforced the importance of choice.” “It provided the opportunity for me to meet the families and share my agency’s vision and commitment.” “For me as a teacher, it was a great way for me to meet agency representatives and gain a better understanding of what supported employment is all about.” “To see the exchanges between families and the agencies was really great. The only suggestion I have is for tours of the agencies, if possible.” “Providers had an equal opportunity to ‘sell their programs’.” “The open house I attended was beautifully organized, upbeat, and very worthwhile for all of us who attended.” “I thought DDDS and DOE did a nice job advertising it.”

When asked how the Open Houses might be improved, there were few suggestions. One agency representative noted “It might be useful to have families there whose sons or daughters are already working with a service provider so new families can get their perspectives on the agency.” “Not everyone had the opportunity to meet with all the agencies so maybe work out the time issue so each family will be able to talk to each agency.” “More refreshments!” “Some families don’t have transportation, so providing rides to the open houses would be a big help.”

Perceived Impact of ESSE on Students’ Employment Prospects.

Respondents were asked the extent to which they felt ESSE would enhance the students’ prospects for securing employment prior to their exiting school. With few exceptions the professionals expressed optimism. “The education staff support is critical to student success. By teaming up with the teachers earlier, we [the adult service providers] can maximize our efforts – at a time in transition that is most critical.”

“Absolutely. I say the earlier the better.” “In the typical scenario, upon graduation most students who have to sit at home and wait for job opportunities will become complacent and lose interest in the work force experience an many times are not urged to reestablish a public connection. This way we can keep them interested and involved.” “If I can work with the school staff to identify the transportation, independent living skills and work skills of students early on, we’re ahead of the curve. This is a tremendous improvement over business as usual.”

“We [agency] feel by working with the schools we have had such a great support and opportunity to get to know our student. We have been able to watch them at their school- arranged jobs and see how they work and what they are able to do. There are skills they have that we may not even of known to tap into because we don’t always have the opportunity to see them work. By gaining this extra knowledge about our student we feel we are that much more equipped to help her find a successful and fulfilling job.” “It makes the transition easier for both the agency and the student. The student better understands the agency involvement and how it differs from their school programs.” “The students are given the time and support to fully consider their vocational goals. By practicing using paratransit they gain confidence. By attending formal meetings and responding to questions—they learn social skills and appropriate workplace behavior.”

Three professionals were of the opinion that ESSE was not likely to have any greater impact on employment than the typical supported employment program. They cited such variables as family involvement which, if lacking, would negate the program’s impact. Another respondent cited concern that many students lacked work goals or realistic goals.

Career Assessments and Job Development Activities To Date.

On the subject of career assessments and job development activities conducted by DVR counselors and agency personnel, at the time of this report 15 students have been involved in or completed the assessment process, and 4 had entered the job development phase. Teachers of youth who were currently in the process spoke favorably about the experience. “My student has really enjoyed the opportunity to talk about where he might like to work” “The student has responded positively during out assessment process and appears very motivated. He appears excited about the different options and job possibilities that are out there.” One respondent reported that “the process has been held up because of funding issues. I don’t know how that will be resolved.”

Input of Direct Service Professionals in Student Selection for ESSE.

The professionals were asked to comment on the degree to which they felt they were able to give input into the student selection process for ESSE. There was almost a 50-50 split in the responses to this question. Those who said they felt they had a role in the student selection did not offer any particular comments. Among the respondents who felt they were not involved, there appeared to be a theme reflected by one individual. “Decisions were made without my input. I would hope once this project is in place that

we will be a full partner in the selection process, because we often have access to family dynamics and family needs that may be unknown to the teachers.” Another respondent said “the only input I had was to give names of eligible candidates, based on school settings and age.” Several of the comments appeared related not to the question at hand but rather to the issues of communication, being invited to meetings, and being considered part of the ESSE team.

ESSE Reporting Requirements.

On the topic of reporting requirement for ESSE, most of the respondents felt that the requirements thus far seem reasonable and not difficult to implement. One person did suggest that online forms and databases might be more efficient and accurate.

Effectiveness of ESSE Timeline.

When asked if there was anything they would change about the project timeline, the majority of the respondents reported feeling satisfied with the timeline; several cited their appreciation that during the course of the year the timeline was modified somewhat, with clearer benchmarks added. One respondent remarked: “At this time we feel things are going well and hope to complete the process as smoothly as it started.”

Most of the comments had more to do with the importance of communication across agencies and schools, so that critical steps could take place in a timely fashion thereby allowing subsequent actions to be implemented. This would be especially important if the project moves beyond a pilot stage and begins serving larger numbers of students. Several respondents mentioned pushing the process harder, so that job placement efforts could begin as early as October or November. Others cited funding decisions as a barrier to action. “Funding should not dictate what happens on the timeline.”

Several people were of the opinion that the timeline was fine; however they felt other variables would negatively push against the timeline. For example: “The DDSS caseloads need to be lowered, to allow staff to better manage family needs. Along with that there seems to be more than one transition coordinator so one person isn’t managing several high schools with many transitioning students.” “I think DVR needs to change the timeline for [ESSE] to make the assessment period longer and possibly the timeline for job development. This may require a separate contract for ESSE students only.”

Cross-Agency Communication and Collaboration.

The majority of respondents reported feeling quite satisfied with the manner in which ESSE partners were communicating with one another. Communication was clearly seen as the primary mechanism for successful collaboration. Several people commented that communication “from the top” about the project continued to improve during the year. Four of the respondents, however, were dissatisfied. “I would say the communication is broken – it seems like everyone gets a piece of the information that

others may not have gotten and we end up having to piece the puzzle together. This is not an efficient way to do business.” “I frequently felt out of the loop.” “Communication among the partners would be a lot better if each player knew what their responsibility was. For instance, who should be the lead person in making sure that meetings are set up?”

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING YEAR ONE

As to be expected in any new endeavor, there were challenges that arose in the first year.

- The project timeline developed at the beginning of the pilot provided a strong starting point. However, it became clear to members of the state advisory committee, that adjustments were needed. This challenge became an opportunity for constituents in the field to identify specific difficulties they were having in implementing project activities, especially in situations where an activity was contingent upon a preceding activity that was being conducted by another entity.

One example of the challenges of the original timeline dealt with the Supported Employment assessments. It was found that these often took more than 90 days to complete. The advisory committee ascertained that time of year may be a contributing factor which had not been previously considered. This delay affected the development of the DVR Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for each youth, which was to be completed within 90 days of the youth’s Determination for Eligibility (entrance into ESSE). At the same time, some adult agencies reported frustration that there was too much lag time between the DVR intake and approval from DVR for funding. These were issues that were subsequently addressed by the state advisory committee in a creative and proactive manner.

Another solution to the timeline issue was to document dates of specific events during the pilot and track completion dates for all individual student milestones and benchmarks. A tracking mechanism was subsequently put into place.

- There was a challenge of “clashing” schedules, between schools and agencies. Schools operate on very rigid and tight schedules that often make it difficult for agencies to gain access to students for work-related activities. This led to the decision to make it clear to all involved parties that work activities would take precedence over other school activities. In the event parents were opposed to this then the model would not be appropriate to meeting the student’s needs.
- During the initial start-up phase it was determined that the existing DDDS directory of provider agencies did not provide ample information for parents to make informed choices. In some cases it was felt that certain agencies had marketing materials that were much more extensive than the materials of their counterparts, and that this might pose an unfair advantage in the selection process. In response, members of the advisory committee developed a matrix that provided consistent terminology and information categories across all agencies. Youth and

their families would also be encouraged to visit agencies (if those agencies were facility-based) or to talk with representatives on non-facility-based agencies.

- At the time of this report, no youth in the first cohort had been placed in employment. However, the issue of funding for post-placement support has been discussed by the state advisory committee. Specifically a concern emerged about funding in cases where job placements occur early on, that is, prior to adult agencies having the approval for funds to provide job coaching support. The advisory committee determined that in most cases the school districts would cover these costs (based on DDDS daily rates) until the funding for agencies came through. This would necessitate a formal agreement with school districts. The consensus of the group was that this “lag time funding” was likely to apply only to a few students, and since a goal of the project was for the youth to be employed prior to school exit, this was not necessarily a negative issue. The group also agreed that early annual planning on this project would give districts ample time to plan finances for that student.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of recommendations emerged from review of the different data sources. These are not presented in any particular order of importance.

- In addition to the ESSE state advisory committee, have each of the professional groups meet regularly. School staff, DDDS case managers, adult service provider staff, and DVR counselors would meet separately to identify issues and make recommendations to the advisory committee. This would allow for emerging issues and challenges to be addressed in a more timely fashion.
- Identify young adults who may have been eligible for project services, but who did not complete the DDDS application, perhaps due to lack of family advocacy.
- Bring the CLIMB benefits counselors into the ESSE process.
- It was acknowledged that the first year cohort of student participants represented those youth who, while eligible for supported employment and currently served in programs for youth with significant disabilities, did not represent students with greater challenges and needs for support. Youth in this category should be added to the service “mix” in subsequent years.
- Each student should have a “point person” assigned to make sure there is a constant flow of information between agencies for every student/family involved, and that there are not mixed messages.
- Often, students already placed in jobs have had difficulty making the transition after school supports cease. It was suggested that school staff “wean” services

from students on the job, to help them meet supported employment criteria in the adult world. One way to do this would be for school programs to work much earlier with adult providers, so they could understand the amount of supports provided in adult supported employment. Other issues such as transportation, dress at work, and so forth, would be important to clarify well before students leave school.

- Invite/recruit family members to sit on the statewide project advisory committee
- Review project timelines on a regular basis to determine where project “slippage” is occurring and why. Since elements on the timeline are critical to the project, it is important to determine exactly what is causing the benchmarks not be met. Typically the issues can be traced to a lack of communication or misunderstanding of another entity’s parameters, constraints, policies, or procedures. The state advisory committee is in a position to address these issues with the appropriate parties.

For example, the following benchmarks were put in place for year two of the project, based on action by the advisory committee. This revised timeline will apply to the second cohort (2007 graduates).

Tasks	Target Date	Agency Responsible
DDDS Application Submitted	December 31	DDDS Transition Specialists, Family
DVR Referral Completed	February 15	DDDS Family Support Specialists
Provider Chosen	June 15	School Transition Specialists, Family
DVR Intake Completed	August 31	DVR SE Counselors
SE Assessment Authorized	September 15	DVR SE Counselors
Assessment Report Submitted	November 15	DVR SE Counselors
Team Meeting Held <i>Team members include family, DDDS, DVR and school personnel</i>	January 15	DVR SE Counselors
Job Placement	April 30	DVR
30-Day Retention	May 31	DVR
Stabilization	June 30	DVR
Closure	September 30	DVR

These dates represent goals for the students, and it is the impression of the advisory committee that most students ought to be able to meet these deadlines; however, the dates are target benchmarks, and can be somewhat flexible.

- There is a concern about the number of ESSE students in New Castle County, which is served by only one DVR Supported Employment Counselor.

- A sample of participating youth should be interviewed by the evaluation team, to get their feedback. For those youth employed, observations of some worksites and interviews with a sampling of employers might provide further information concerning the degree of effectiveness of ESSE.

SUMMARY

In March 2005 the Delaware Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS), the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), and the Department of Education (DDOE) embarked on an exciting joint venture called Early Start to Supported Employment (ESSE). The purpose of this pilot project is to demonstrate the feasibility of a more seamless transition for students with significant disabilities leaving school and entering the adult workforce. While there have been interagency collaborative efforts in the past, many of these youth have continued to experience difficult and unsuccessful transitions to adult service options. In response to this, ESSE aims to align resources that would prevent a gap in services for these students, and end the lag time that typically occurs between a youth's exit from school and the receipt of adult services.

This evaluation examined the activities that took place in year one of the ESSE pilot project. Through reviews of project documents and products and interviews with stakeholders a number of findings and themes emerged, which are documented in this report.

Overall, the ESSE project has met all of its start-up objectives, including outreach and marketing to all partners and constituents; development of numerous products; selection of two student cohorts (graduates in the classes of 2006 and 2007); establishment of a clear timeline that specifies benchmarks and milestones to be achieved; and collaborative activities among teachers, DDDS case managers and family support specialists, and DVR counselors to provide assessments, career exploration, and initial job development efforts.

From the top down, it was evident that there was substantial support for this pilot project. The directors of DDDS and DVR, along with leadership at DDOE, not only gave their approval for the project, they ensured that the policies and procedures of their respective agencies would encourage cross-agency partnerships. They recognized that partnerships confined to paper alone would not be sufficient; the way had to be paved for working relationships among personnel at the direct service level in order for ESSE to succeed.

Members of the state advisory committee for ESSE also deserve high marks for their commitment to excellence and daily oversight of the project. The advisory committee was extremely action-oriented and this was evidenced by the amount of products generated, the thorough timeline, the extensive communication with all partners in the field, and technical assistance provided.

At the field level, families and direct service professionals were surveyed to get their reactions to year one of the project. The majority of respondents indicated a high level of satisfaction with the implementation of ESSE and all of the respondents offered recommendations for improving various aspects of the model. Challenges and recommendations from the field were noted in this report.

Since the outcome of paid work, with post-school support in place before students leave school, is the primary goal of this pilot, subsequent evaluation activities will focus on student outcomes. At the time of this evaluation there were no final outcomes to report; therefore this evaluation focused on the process of getting the pilot up and running.

There is a commitment from each primary agency to conduct ESSE over multiple years in order to learn how to more effectively support successful employment outcomes for students requiring long-term adult services. Should the project continue on the trajectory already established, this is likely to be a highly successful model with wide-ranging implications for service delivery to this target population.